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BY

E. EVERETT-GREEN

A TALE OF THE SIEGE OF ANTWERP

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A·TALE·OF THE·WONDERFUL·SIEGE·OF ANTWERP MDLXXXV

ALEXANDER·FARNESE PRINCE·OF·PARMA

THOMAS·NELSON·AND·SONS

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SHUT IN

A Tale of the Wonderful Siege of Antwerp in the Year 1585

By

E. EVERETT-GREEN

Author of "In the Days of Chivalry," "The Church and the King," "The Lord of Dynevor," &c. &c.

T. NELSON AND SONS

London, Edinburgh, and New York

1894

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SHUT IN.

CHAPTER I.

A TURBULENT CITY.

"CUT the dike! drown the whole country! Was ever such madness heard of? Burgomaster or no Burgomaster, we'll not stand by to see ourselves ruined. Cut the dike, forsooth! What next will they say?"

"Cut the dike! And what does he think will become of our twelve thousand fat oxen? And if all the beasts perish, how is the city to be fed? Pugh! the Burgomaster has left his senses behind him at Delft, but he will not find that all the city has gone mad with him. We others shall have somewhat to say before we are all ruined; and the colleges will be all with us. The Schepens may say what they will, but the Broad Council will override them."

"Ay, verily; we will see that it does. We will beat up the whole town. Every man with an ounce of sense in his pate will be on our side. *Hemel!* I cannot think

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what has come over the Burgomaster that he should dream of such a measure, and carry it through the Board."

The speakers were, for the most part, great brawny fellows, wearing the distinctive dress of the butchers' guild, their long, shining knives slung at their girdles. Their broad Dutch faces were flushed with excitement and indignation. They also spoke in angry tones, and seemed to carry the crowd with them. There was a large crowd gathered in the open space about the beautiful Cathedral church of "Our Lady"—the church that had suffered so cruelly twenty years before from the wild fury of the Iconoclasts. Some exciting piece of news had plainly been brought into the city, and all Antwerp was moved at it. In those days of bloodshed and warfare, when it was known that that military genius Alexander Farnese, Prince of Parma, was threatening Antwerp, and making preparations for a determined siege of that most important stronghold, it was like enough that news was greedily listened to whenever it got about, and that there were continually these gatherings at street-corners and in open places to discuss the latest item of intelligence brought in. After twenty years of dire struggle, and the innumerable vicissitudes of fortune which inclined sometimes towards the tyrant of Spain, sitting spider-like in his cabinet hundreds of leagues away, sometimes towards the noble champion of religious liberty, William, Prince of Orange, who for years had been the true head and right arm of the party of freedom, it was natural, perhaps, that even the thought of a coming siege should not arouse quite the dread and

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sense of unity that it would have done a generation before. At the first outbreak of a storm, men gather together and stand shoulder to shoulder against a common foe; but after long years of fighting, it often happens that minor issues creep in and promote disunion and jealousy. It had been so, alas! in the Netherlands during the past years. The first warm and generous love for liberty and religious freedom had in many places either died away in dull despair or been exterminated by fire and sword. Brabant and Flanders were all but lost already to the cause of liberty; and of that ring of five important cities —Ghent, Dendermonde, Brussels, Mechlin, and Antwerp— which the Prince of Parma had vowed to subdue, the first two had already fallen, and it was well known that if Antwerp likewise fell, the other two must fall with it, and all the lower Netherlands return to their old obedience to the tyrant of the Escorial.

Holland and Zeeland were holding out nobly, the spirit of the great William living, as it were, within them; but in the lower provinces Spanish gold and French guile were doing their paralyzing work. Some great persons, some important strongholds, had literally been bought back by Philip of Spain; whilst numerous others, leaning more and more upon the belief in the French alliance, and the hope that from France a prince and deliverer would arise for them, looked on with an approach towards apathy at the struggles of the moment, disposed rather to temporize and to wait than to stand shoulder to shoulder in the fight as they had stood long years before, when the yoke of

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Spain had been in a fair way of being broken from off their neck.

And now Antwerp was threatened. The Prince of Parma had vowed himself to the task of its reduction, and the Prince of Orange had equally vowed himself to save it from the destroying hand of Spain. It was well known that with Antwerp fell the whole of the lower Netherlands. The Spaniards recognized this fact as fully as the people themselves.

"If we get Antwerp, you go to mass with us," they said, in words that had grown to be almost a proverb; "and if you save Antwerp, we go to conventicle with you."

Antwerp was well aware of her own importance, and not a little proud of it; but the city was in itself a turbulent little republic, and of late years a republic which had been fast lapsing into anarchy. It had its Burgomaster, it is true; and at this time the Burgomaster was none other than the talented and famous Marnix, Lord of Sainte Aldegonde, orator, soldier, statesman, poet, and scholar, who had accepted this post (far humbler than many he had previously occupied) at the personal instance of the Prince of Orange, who knew that the city needed a great man at its head, and had persuaded his friend to try to fill that office at this crisis in its history. But though there was a Burgomaster, he had but one vote on the Board of magistrates or Schepens,—and as it was a Board governed by a majority, measures were continually passed against the wish of the Burgomaster. Then

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there were innumerable other boards or colleges, as they were called, of militia-colonels, ward-masters, deacons, and so forth, to say nothing of the important city-guilds such as that of the butchers; and all these hydra-heads were represented at the weekly meeting of the Broad Council, before which anybody could force any matter to be brought. The confusion and wrangling here beggars all description, and might well drive to distraction any Burgomaster who desired to impose the wise will of the Prince of Orange upon the turbulent city.

The name of the Prince, however, was the one name which still acted as something of a talisman in Antwerp. It was his name which had enabled the Burgomaster to induce the Board of Schepens to decree that the Blaw-garen should be cut and the great Kowenstyn Dike submerged. But it was one thing for the Schepens to decree this wise and politic step, and quite another for the city to ratify that decision.

Every moment the crowd was growing larger in the open space, and eager questions were being passed from mouth to mouth. Those who did not fully understand the bearing of the question were asking information of those who did; and in the centre of one group stood a tall, fine-looking man of some five-and-thirty summers, who wore the dress of a militia-colonel, and who appeared to have gathered about him some of the most orderly and intelligent of the crowd.

"My friends," he said, "if you will listen to me for a few minutes I will tell you the meaning of this order, and

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explain to you its wisdom. The very fact that the advice comes from the great Prince himself should be enough for the people of Antwerp."

A murmur went through the crowd—it was not easy to say whether of assent or of discontent; but at least the sound of that name imposed silence upon the group in the immediate neighbourhood of the speaker, and though shouts of defiance and derision went up still from the knots around the burly butchers, the colonel was able to speak unchecked to his ring of listeners.

"My friends and fellow-citizens," he said again, "it is time for us to face the fact that a great peril is before us. We stand in the forefront of this great fight for our religion and our liberty; and if Antwerp falls, the whole cause for which hundreds of thousands of lives have been laid down dies in this land, and the Inquisition, with its racks and its fires and all its infernal machinery, will be set up again. Say, my fellow-citizens, do you wish for this?"

A shout, a howl of execration was the reply, and the ring closed more closely round the speaker. There were plenty of Roman Catholics still in Antwerp, plenty who revered and supported the "old faith," as it was often called, and who did not personally dread the fury of the Inquisitors; but they did abominate the tyranny of the institution almost as much as those who had embraced the reformed doctrines, and if there were not unity of religious belief within the walls of the city, there was unity in detestation of Spanish tyranny and the power of the Inquisition.

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"Good!" continued the speaker, having got the reply he desired. "I see that in this matter we are well agreed. Wherefore at all costs Antwerp must be saved, and it behoves us most seriously to consider how best we may save her. The great Prince knows as well as we can do how great a thing the welfare of this city is to the cause of freedom; and I am willing to believe that with his great wisdom and judgment, and his experiences of twenty years of warfare, he is better qualified to judge what measures it is for us to take than we on the spot can settle for ourselves. We have trusted him with many and great matters before; can we not trust him also with this?"

There was another murmur which sounded like one of assent; and a voice from the crowd asked,—

"But why should the dike be pierced? why should the whole country be made desolate? A day's toil would serve to pierce the dike, but it will be the work of a generation to reclaim the land again when once it has been submerged. Why are we to submit to such loss and damage?"

"Verily, because the loss of the city would be tenfold greater; whilst the Prince of Parma—the greatest general, after our own Prince, that the world has ever seen—has vowed himself to the task of its reduction, and it is for us to thwart him, even at the cost of present loss, that the cause of freedom may not be for ever lost to us and our children."

"But the reason—the reason?" asked many voices; and

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the colonel, taking his sheathed sword in his hand, proceeded rapidly to make a rude diagram upon the sandy ground on which they were standing, the people pressing round to see.

"Here, my friends," he said, pointing, "is the city of Antwerp within her walls, standing upon the great river Scheldt, which flows between its great dikes to the sea. Here, guarding its right bank, is the Blaw-garen Dike, and at right angles to the Blaw-garen, and starting from it, is the Kowenstyn. Here again, nearer to the city, between her and the sea, has the Prince of Parma made his camp, and what he threatens to do is this: to build a bridge across the Scheldt, and thus cut off supplies, not only from Antwerp, but from Brussels also, and starve us into a surrender; for, as you well know, we can get little by land from provinces which have with craven fear returned to their old allegiance to Spain, and it is to Holland and Zeeland we must look for the relief and help we shall soon begin to need."

"Bridge the Scheldt!" called out a voice from the crowd, in accents of deep derision. "Verily we shall hear next that the Prince of Parma has bridged the great gulf that divides Dives and Lazarus!" And the laugh with which the crowd greeted this sally showed that the general feeling was one of derision at the proposed scheme.

"My friends," answered the spokesman, "I well understand your feelings. We know the depth and swiftness of our river, its great fall of tide every twelve hours, the huge ice-floes which come down in winter, and the thought of

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closing it by a bridge seems well-nigh a chimera. But then there is this to think of, on the other side—our great Prince does not so regard it. Had he thought the task to be beyond the power of man, would he have counselled our Burgomaster to order the piercing of the dikes? No, most assuredly not. What he says is this:—Pierce your dikes, submerge your pasture-land and outlying villages, and the sea will roll up to the very walls of Antwerp, and render a blockade impossible. The fleet from Zeeland will scour these waters, routing the enemy and bringing corn for the needs of the citizens. Antwerp will be for the time an island, and will laugh to scorn the fear of famine or siege. Once make this patriotic resolve to sustain present loss of goods, and the Prince of Parma must retire discomfited; but think first of the cattle and second of the cause, and the day may come when we shall bitterly repent our folly, and find that repentance comes too late. For we have a marvellously skilful foe against us, and if we despise him at the outset, we are like to repent our folly in dust and ashes in the days to come."

The people listened in silence, half convinced, and yet unable or unwilling to believe that their peril was as great as this soldier would make out. To bridge the Scheldt in such a way as to blockade the city seemed the wildest of wild chimeras to the inhabitants of Antwerp, who knew something of the character of their great river, and its depth and volume of water. If the Prince did manage to construct a bridge in the teeth of the opposition of the united fleets of Zeeland and Antwerp, the first of the ice

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coming down would sweep it away like a child's toy. Such was the opinion of the majority of those gathered round the diagram in the sand, discussing the situation and hazarding all manner of opinions. The speaker himself was now standing aside in thoughtful silence. A burly butcher came up and looked at the drawing, and heard what was passing from mouth to mouth in the crowd.

"Bridge the river, quotha! starve the people into capitulation! And yet the first step to avoid starvation is to drown twelve thousand fat oxen! A pretty method that!"

"Could not the oxen be slain and the meat salted down for use during the siege?" suggested one practical juffrouw; but the butcher only sniffed scornfully.

"And why eat salted meat when fresh may be had day by day?—just for the bogey terror of a few dreamers! Let this wonderful Prince of Parma build his bridge if he can! How does he think he will do it, with all Antwerp looking on on one side and Holland and Zeeland on the other? Only a fool or a traitor would believe such a thing! Listen not to yon foreigner, good folks—Antwerp has had something too much of foreign treachery already—listen to your own good citizens, who have no aim but the public weal!"

And the burly Dutchman cast a defiant look upon the officer, who raised his head at the challenge to his loyalty, and said,—

"Yes, my friends, I am an Englishman by birth. I have never striven to pass as any other. But I came into

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this city as a child, and here have I dwelt as one of its citizens. My own country is unknown to me. My life has been bound up in Antwerp. My wife is one of your daughters, and for the cause of Antwerp and liberty I would gladly lay down my life. I have shed my blood in the strife before, and I am ready to do so again. Treachery and enough has there been within the walls of Antwerp—foreign treachery, and treachery at home. But which of you can lay that charge against me? If he do but prove his words, smite off my head as I stand here! I will not resist the stroke."

There was a murmur in the crowd, and several men cried shame upon the butcher.

"The Heer soldier speaks well. He has ever been true to the cause of Antwerp. He is no traitor."

"Then let him hold his peace, and no more talk of cutting the dikes!" growled the butcher sulkily; "for I hold that all who strive for such a thing are traitors to the commonwealth."

"Then the Prince is such a traitor," said the officer, in a tone of fine scorn; "for it is the special charge laid by him upon our Burgomaster, who has had personal converse with him at Delft, that the dikes be pierced, and Antwerp saved from the miseries of another siege, and from the peril with which she is menaced." And so saying, the colonel turned on his heel and walked rapidly away, whilst the tumult in the crowd rose again as before, all sorts of arguments being bandied about, but the prevailing feeling throughout being against the proposed measure.

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For many days the city was in a ferment, and from house to house went emissaries from various boards and colleges urging the people to refuse to submit to the drastic measures proposed to them. The citizens had immense power in Antwerp, for the main bulk of the troops consisted of the burgher militia, which was very well trained and always ready to fight; but it lacked the necessary element of submission, and was a turbulent and undocile body when not under arms, and was, of course, governed almost entirely by the will of the citizens from whom it was drawn. There was a regiment of English in the place under Colonel Morgan; but there had been mutiny in the regiment, and two of the captains had been hanged. Antwerp was in a strangely distracted state, and was rent by faction within her walls—a thing which William of Orange knew and grieved over, and which added tenfold to his fears for the ultimate result of the struggle he knew to be impending. Had he lived to give his weight and authority to the counsels of prudence, perchance many of the gigantic blunders which characterized this struggle might have been averted.

The days flew by, and nothing was talked of in the city but the proposed destruction of the great Blaw-garen Dike, and the strenuous resistance to be made at the next Broad Council against the step. The butchers were the most rancorously opposed to it, but the bulk of the citizens shared in their dislike to the submerging of the surrounding territory, and stormy scenes were daily enacted in the streets. The Burgomaster was not unfrequently hooted as

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he rode abroad, and lampoons were posted up on the churches and other public places ridiculing the plan and its projectors, and asking what was to become of the miserable inhabitants of the villages to be submerged, and whether Antwerp would be saddled with the maintenance of all these homeless creatures in addition to all she had to do for her own people.

Of course there are always two sides to every question, and the step proposed was undoubtedly a serious one. Much of the reclaimed country of the Netherlands was already again under water. Again and again for military and strategical purposes dikes had been ruptured and whole tracts of country submerged. To add another immense area of water to what had already been given back to the hungry sea might well arouse anxious fears, and numbers of the citizens declared that nothing in that way ought to be done, at least until Parma's bridge had become something other than a figment of his imagination.

"Time enough when the bridge is built," was what the greater part of the citizens were saying, keeping an air of judicious neutrality. They did not abuse the scheme like the butchers, nor advocate it like the small minority who trusted in the sagacity of the Prince. But they took up the ground that there was plenty of time to see how things turned, and that it would be worse than folly to desolate their country unless the need should become much sorer than it was at present.

This theory sounded so very plausible that it carried away the bulk of the inhabitants, and it was pretty well

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understood even before the Broad Council met that the citizens would absolutely refuse to permit the undertaking, and that they would carry the day against the Burgomaster and his few friends and supporters. Deputations without number had waited on Sainte Aldegonde already, and it was confidently known throughout the city that he himself had been shaken by the arguments brought to bear upon him.

Shortly before sunset, on a bright evening at the close of this memorable June, the same colonel of militia who had addressed the crowd a few days previously was slowly and thoughtfully wending his way in the direction of Hooch Straet from the great public assembly, which had met, as usual, for the discussion of municipal affairs.

Lionel Wilford had left early. His voice was of no use amongst the tumultuous tongues all wagging together at the Broad Council. He had waited to see the issue of the day, though to him it had been from the first a foregone conclusion; and when he saw that nothing could shake the people's resolve to let the dikes remain as they were, he left the council-room and made his way slowly home, wondering within himself what would be the outcome of all this, and whether his townsfolk would not live bitterly to regret the obstinacy of the present moment, when it might be too late to take the step urged upon them now.

Lionel walked onwards till he found himself in the wide street in which his home lay, and looked up with some natural affection at the great timbered house, with its shining windows and quaint gables and chimneys, in

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which he and his kindred dwelt in almost patriarchal fashion.

Once this building, with its carved beams, queer little balconies, and its outer stairway to the first-floor rooms, had been two houses—the one occupied by Lionel's father and mother, Thomas and Joan Wilford; the other, by the family of Hermann and Barbara Van der Hammer, merchant partners of the Wilfords, whom in the days of the Marian persecutions the Wilfords had come across the water to join. A close friendship and intimacy had sprung up between the two families, and when, some ten years since, Lionel had married Roosje, the eldest daughter of the Van der Hammer household, the two houses had been practically thrown into one, and the two families grew up together almost as one, each speaking equally the language of the other, and sharing together good fortune and ill, as those must needs do who live in such stirring times, and have been through so many vicissitudes of fortune together.

These had been terrible years for the Netherlands and for Antwerp—these past twenty years of desperate warfare with the richest and most powerful sovereign of the world. Scarce could the Wilfords have told why they had not long ago returned to their native shores, to escape the horrors of which they were sometimes daily the witnesses. They had barely escaped with life during the "Spanish Fury" in Alva's day, and looked back yet with a shudder to that fearful time, when it seemed as though the very gates of hell had been opened upon them.

And yet here they were still, living in their peaceful

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home in Hooch Straet, and at the present time enjoying the fruit of their industry and successful trading. It is a strange thing how the Provinces thrived and grew rich in the midst of the terrible struggle for existence which they waged so long against their tyrant, and how entirely and completely ruin followed any submission to the Spanish crown. Antwerp, in spite of all it had gone through, was rich and prosperous at this time, and none amongst her merchant princes were more highly esteemed for uprightness and just dealing than those of the house of Wilford and Van der Hammer.

Lionel had taken his share in the business dealings of the house; but he had combined this with good service in the burgher militia, as indeed almost all able-bodied men strove to do in those days. Lionel had thought of retiring from his military duties, to relieve his father of some of his work, when this new peril of siege threatened the city. This hardly being the time to unbuckle his sword, he had volunteered to remain for another year at least in the service, and to organize a small new band of young men from the burgher classes, to act as a volunteer reserve for the militia in this time of coming peril. These youths would remain in their own homes, as did many of the burgher contingent, coming forth as required for drill or for fighting. And the band thus got together promised to be one of the best the city had yet seen. Lionel was personally much respected and liked, and his own brothers and brothers-in-law formed an admirable nucleus for the contingent.

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Up the outer staircase trod Lionel with his steady step, and a light form sprang out upon the balcony to meet him.

"It is he!" cried a clear young voice. "Brother, come in and tell us all. Father is wishing so much to hear, and so is the vader too."

It was the way in that house to call the elders father and mother indiscriminately, whether they were Wilfords or Van der Hammers, the English term being given to the former, and the Dutch to the latter, by all the young folks alike. It was his own sister Maud who had sprung out to welcome him—the only girl on the English side of the house. She was a sweet-faced maiden of twenty summers, with blue eyes, and abundant hair of a rich golden-brown colour. Lionel felt an almost fatherly affection for the sister so much younger than himself. Indeed, as the three children who had been born after him had died in infancy, a great gap of ten years divided him from his next brother, Harold, and he felt almost as though he belonged to the older generation, and was accorded by all a certain measure of respect, as though the rest of the double family recognized this distinction. As a married man, too, he had some claim to authority, and his father had long ago resigned the reins of domestic government into his hands and those of his wife.

"Yes, come and tell us the result of the Broad Council," said the voice of the elder Wilford from within the room; and Lionel stepped across the threshold of the door-window, to find himself in the midst of a regular family gathering.

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This pleasant room, with its five large windows facing the street (the middle one of which was the door which opened upon the wooden balcony), was the general living and feeding room of the large family party. It ran through both houses, and was quite forty feet long and twenty wide. There was a great stove at either end, neither of which was lighted this warm June day; and a long table occupied the half of the apartment, with two arm-chairs at either end, and benches down the sides.

The floor of the room was boarded, and the boards literally shone like mirrors, and those who trod upon them went carefully by long practice, as they were almost as slippery as ice. The windows, too, shone with the same wonderful cleanliness, and not a speck of dust was to be seen in the whole place. One wall was almost entirely composed of quaint, carved shelves, on which the earthenware and china vessels used at table were arranged with the greatest care. The bottom part of this great cabinet (if it could so be called) consisted of cupboards, in which the wooden trenchers and knives were stored, and these were as white and spotless as constant scrubbing could make them. All the furniture shone with the polishing of willing hands, and the whole air of the place was one of spotless cleanliness and brightness. One or two pictures on the wall, and a few small squares of carpet (laid down like islands in the midst of a shining sea), gave a look of simple comfort to the room, which was otherwise rather severely plain in its fittings; but the home-like aspect made amends for much, and the family party as-

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sembled there could not fail to attract admiration and interest.

Lionel's father was a very fine-looking old man of some sixty summers, with curling white hair, and a face that seemed like an elder edition of that of his son. He sat near to the unlighted stove, in a place that was plainly always his own, with his feet upon one of the carpets, and his hands grasping the carved arms of his big chair. Beside him was a dainty-looking old dame, with bright blue eyes and a picturesque cap that was not like the ones most often seen in Antwerp. She had clung to the recollection of the coif her mother used to wear in England, and always made her own on the same pattern.

Opposite to this pair of old folks sat another couple, in another brace of high-backed chairs. But Heer Van der Hammer was very different in appearance from his old friend. He was some five years younger, and would not have had any appearance of old age had it not been for the sufferings he had been through during the course of the past years. Once he had been in prison, twice he had been badly wounded, and from the effects of the last wound he had never entirely recovered. It had so far crippled him that he was forced to remain for the greater part of his time a prisoner in his chair; and though he looked stout and hale yet, he was not fit for active employment, and his main work lay in the examination of his books, and in the correspondence needed with foreign lands; for he could wield a pen as well as a sword, and that little table at his right hand was almost always heaped

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with books and papers. He was big and burly in figure, and had a shrewd eye and a loud voice. Mr. Wilford was the more refined and handsome of the pair, but there was considerable power in the face of Van der Hammer.

His wife was of the fine Dutch type—dark-eyed, sweet-faced, and with a pretty, shrinking manner. She seldom lifted up her voice in the assembled family circle; yet she was universally beloved, and was the grandmother towards whom the children gravitated almost as a matter of course.

Dame Wilford loved the little ones well, but she was far more strict with them than was the juffrouw Van der Hammer.

With the exception of Maud, the pretty girl who had welcomed Lionel back, all the Wilfords were sons; Harold and Malcolm following their brother in his soldier-like calling, and Philip, the youngest, being as eager as the rest, though only lately considered man enough to take part in military tactics.

On the Dutch side of the double family there had been more equal division of sexes. Roosje, the eldest of the family, had been a happy wife and mother for many years now; but Otto and Joris, who came next to her, had shown no disposition towards marriage, and preferred to lead the lives of burgher-citizens, dividing their time between military training and their father's merchant offices on the Hoy Kay, as the bulk of the youth of the town did in those stirring days. They were strong-built young fellows, of twenty-five and twenty-four summers

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respectively, and were always together, and the best of comrades and friends.

Gertrude, a tranquil maiden of two-and-twenty, came next, and it was confidently expected that she and Harold would be married as soon as the country was in a more settled state. The attachment had grown up from childhood, and nothing had disturbed its even course. Maurice, a beautiful lad of twenty, and Coosje, a wilful and charming child of eighteen, concluded the quiver of the Van der Hammer parents. And now, having introduced its various members, I leave the personages in the household to speak for themselves and develop in their own way.

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CHAPTER II.

A BURGHER HOUSEHOLD.

"WELL, my son, what news dost thou bring? How goes the decision at the Broad Council?"

"Dead against the counsel of the Prince," answered Lionel, as he uncovered and made a reverence to his parents (as was his invariable custom on entering the house), and unbuckled his sword, which he handed to his young brother Philip. "I had little hope from the first, after I heard the manner in which our Burgomaster received the deputations of the butchers. Bah! they would sell the whole city of Antwerp for the sake of a few hundred oxen!"

"Blind fools! blind fools!" spoke the elder Van der Hammer, with a solemn shake of the head. "Heaven send we do not bitterly repent our folly! What said the Burgomaster at the Council? He was eloquent enow at the Board of Schepens but a week ago, and so moved them that they voted as one man (a thing sufficiently strange) for the destruction of the dike. Where was his eloquence to-day?"

Lionel shook his head with grave disapprobation.

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"Methinks our brilliant and most patriotic Burgomaster is something too fine a tool for the use to which he is now put. We want a sledge-hammer to dash opposition in pieces, and carry all before it with its own force and weight. The Lord of Sainte Aldegonde is as a finely-tempered weapon, which in its right place can achieve wonders, but which is like to be shivered to fragments if used for work to which it is not made. To put the matter in plain words, our Burgomaster sees too clearly both sides of the question; he puts himself too readily into the position of those who oppose him, and sees the matter with their eyes. This may be the gift of a great genius, but it may be a fatal gift to a ruler in times of peril such as encompass us now. When the townsfolk represent to him that it would be folly to destroy all the meat for the city just at the time when famine be threatening, he sees clearly that they have there a point in their favour; and when others get up and say that it will be time enow to pierce the dike when the Prince of Parma has built his bridge, then again he wavers and inclines to see that point too."

"And is there not reason in that, son Lionel?" asked the mother, who was anxiously listening to her son's report; for all Antwerp was keenly interested in the result of to-day's council. "Why should we not wait, before devastating the country, until the need thereof be more pressing than at this moment?"

"Because, my mother, we have a wary and sleepless foe to deal with, and we know not how long we may hold

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the command of these two dikes—the Blaw-garen and Kowenstyn. The Prince of Parma is scattering his forts up and down the land. He swoops down like an eagle on some unprotected or but feebly-protected spot—if possible, upon some dike—and lo! in a few days, sometimes in a single night, a fortress springs up as if by magic, with the red-and-yellow flag of Spain floating over it. The Sieur of Kowenstyn was at the Council this day, and urged upon our Burgomaster the need of piercing the dike, and letting the waters of the Scheldt roll to the very walls of Antwerp, mingled with the salt sea waves of the ocean beyond. He urged upon us that the time was ours now, but that no man might know how long we might hold the dike, with the veteran Spaniard Mondragon and his iron followers in such close proximity. Methought he made a wondrous telling oration, and I had hoped his counsel would have carried the day; but alas—"

"Oh, what?" cried young Maurice, with sparkling eyes, and cheeks that were flushed with excitement. "Brother, who did make answer to him? And what did they say to such an appeal?"

"Marry, they gave such an answer that I tingled with shame for mine own class and calling. Three of our colonels of militia rose one after the other, and in language that was little short of insulting proclaimed that it would be useless for the Sieur of Kowenstyn or for the Burgomaster himself to think of ordering the piercing of the dike, for that they and their bands would stop the work

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by force if it were begun, and that none but cowards would think of ruining their land for a bogey terror like that of Parma's bridge!"

"Those were ill words for Antwerp's soldiers to speak in the open council!" said Van der Hammer, with slow deliberation. "It is the duty of the soldier to obey his officer, and for the officer to obey the lawful authority of those who bear rule over us. If this be the spirit of our city, God help us! I fear her doom is already signed!"

"It was in part the jealous ill-will of the citizens towards the Lord of Kowenstyn. Thou knowest, my father, how many of our burgher class delight in a gibe at those born to rank and affluence. A sneer at his courage was not to be foregone; and he knew it right well, and answered by marching from the council-chamber in lofty dudgeon, his sword clanking as he moved, and his eyes in their deep sockets flashing fire. He turned at the door to make his bow to our Burgomaster, and methought there was something sinister and fearsome in his aspect. There was derision in the deep bow he made to us; and it seemed when he had vanished from the room as though some momentary uneasiness fell upon the whole assembly."

"And didst thou raise thy voice, son Lionel?" asked his father. "I trow this be no time to keep silence when there be words of sound wisdom to speak."

"I did put in my word there," answered Lionel. "I rose to my feet in the silence which followed the clang of the door, and I addressed our Burgomaster in mine own name

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and that of my band of volunteers, saying that not only did I not endorse the words of the colonels who had spoken before me, but that I here tendered him our loyal service for the work of the destruction of the dike, if he still desired that work undertaken; and I would have gone on to urge that the counsel of the Sieur of Kowenstyn should be well weighed and considered, when I was hissed down by a multitude of angry voices, all calling me foreigner, traitor, and English spy—as is the way of those who know themselves in the wrong, and will not have the right way set before them."

"Ay, verily, it is ever so in this unhappy city," said Van der Hammer, in his slow, ponderous way. "Methinks they would sooner hand it over to the Prince of Parma than learn to agree amongst themselves. Heaven send we do not have cause bitterly to repent our insensate folly! And how spoke the Burgomaster then?"

"He knew not what to say. He reminded us that the counsel he had given at the Board of Schepens was the counsel of the great Prince of Orange, whose name is still held in reverence, even here in Antwerp. That reminder told for a moment, but selfish fears soon drove it out again; and when the voting came, there were scarce a third to follow the wishes of our great William. The only hope for the city in this matter is for him to come in person to urge it. Were he in our midst, methinks the thing could yet be carried; without that personal presence we shall walk on blindly till we find ourselves caught in our own net."

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"But, brother," said Gertrude, with a timid appeal, "surely before the Prince of Parma can even begin his bridge, the French will have come to our aid! Methought the King of France was to have been made the king of these lands ere now. When we have France to help us in our struggle, surely we need not fear!"

"*When* we have it," answered Lionel, with something of bitter emphasis in his tone, "then it will be time to talk of relaxing our efforts. Ach! it sickens me to hear this perpetual talk of France, France, France! Did we not have enough of France, I say, with that traitor of Anjou? Has Antwerp already forgot the French Fury, that she is holding out her arms again to France, and seeking protection beneath her sceptre? The time will come when she will bitterly repent her folly and credulity, and will curse the apathy with which she has let the precious time go by, thinking always that help and succour are coming to her from France! And when her eyes are opened at the last, she will find, I greatly fear me, that they are opened too late."

"O brother, art thou not a prophet of evil?" asked Maud, with some natural shrinking in her eyes. "All the world speaks of the French alliance and what will be done for us then."

"Ay, they speak of it, and whilst they speak they let time pass, and dally with danger; but Parma does not dally and sleep, nor would the great Prince of Orange countenance such folly. But to trust in France, to my thinking, is like, in days of old, putting faith in Egypt.

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It is like a reed which, if a man lean upon it, it will pierce his hand. Yon dressed-up doll upon the French throne, whose favourite pastime is to put on the garb of a woman and paint his face and adorn himself like a harlot, is he the man to whom these Provinces shall turn for help in the hour of dire necessity? And behind the throne of that painted fop stands that woman Jezebel, at whose doors lies the tragedy of St. Bartholomew. Is she one to help on the cause of religious freedom? And the Balafré—the dark Duke of Guise, the idol of the people—is he to be trusted to fight in the cause to which we are bound?"

"But there is Henry of Navarre," put in Maurice eagerly; "and if the King of France dies childless, as seems like, all men say he will be the next king; and he—"

"Well?" questioned Lionel briefly. "And what is he?"

Maurice did not reply, but looked to his father, who said,—

"Henry of Navarre is at least a man and a soldier, and they say of him that his heart is in the cause of the reformed faith. More than that I know not myself; but I do say this, that since the Prince of Orange hath ever been the warm friend of the French alliance, I cannot see why we humbler folk need cry scorn of it. Surely one who dwells in high places as he does can better see and judge than humble burgher-citizens."

Lionel slowly seated himself in his accustomed chair, and rested his chin upon his hand. His face was grave and thoughtful.

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"I know that well," he answered. "The Prince *is* the advocate of that alliance, and he has ever been our best counsellor and guide in these troubled times; and yet mine own heart misgives me. I cannot but wish it were to England's Queen rather than to the King of France that we were looking now."

"What—to little England! and with the next in succession the bitter foe of the reformed faith—the captive Mary Stuart, whom half the nation have sworn to rescue and make Queen!" exclaimed Van der Hammer, who shared the prevailing and not unnatural opinion of his country that England would be a very helpless ally for the Netherlands in their present crisis. "Nay, son Lionel, I can scarce go with thee there, albeit I have ever thought well of England and the English, as I have good cause to do;" and the Dutchman and Englishman exchanged bows with each other, whilst Lionel answered thoughtfully,—

"It may be but fantasy on my part, and yet I have ever longed to see us banded with England in this struggle. Methinks that she will have to be one day our ally, and make common cause against a common foe. I hear it whispered abroad, by those who know the secrets of the Spanish court, that when that tyrant has crushed these Provinces beneath his iron heel, he will next descend upon the shores of England, and bring that land again beneath the sway of Rome. Wherefore I would fain see our two countries standing shoulder to shoulder in the fight against the tyrant of Spain. But with these long-drawn negotia-

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tions with France I have neither patience nor sympathy. We have seen something too much of French treachery and double-dealing of late. England's Queen may be long in making up her mind to enter upon a quarrel against a foe so powerful as Philip of Spain, but at least she will not betray a trust once undertaken by herself and her people."

"I myself think with thee, my son," said the elder Wilford thoughtfully. "The Princess Elizabeth was but a girl when I left the country, and her jealous sister kept her in what was little other than imprisonment; yet even so it was said of her that she had inherited a wonderful measure of the spirit of her sire; and well do I remember what England was under the rule of the great Henry. If she be her father's daughter, she be more of a man than the weakling who wields the sceptre of France. I would fain believe that England would stand forth the champion of this down-trodden land; but so long as our rulers look first to France, we cannot hope that the royal Elizabeth will be eager to befriend us."

"Men say she regards us with friendly eyes," said Lionel, "but covets not the task of standing betwixt us and Spain. She would sooner that we received aid from France. But the presence of Colonel Morgan and his soldiers within the walls of our citadel here shows plainly that England is with us in this struggle."

But the discussion of the greater questions of the day did not hold the younger members of the family as breathlessly attentive as the recital of what was actually going

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on within the city walls. The families of Wilford and Van der Hammer were better instructed in the politics of the day than many burgher households, owing perhaps to their facilities for obtaining news through their trading vessels, and to the fact that they represented two nationalities in their own household; but even so, it was far more interesting to the younger members of the family to hear of local rather than of national affairs; and although they were too well trained to interrupt their elders, they listened with eager pleasure to the sound of ringing footsteps upon the polished stairs which led upwards from below. These footsteps were accompanied by sounds of martial import—the clash of a sword striking against the edge of the stair, and the ring of mailed gloves thrown down upon the table without.

"It is the jonkhers returned from their drill," remarked Wilford, with his eyes upon the door; and Coosje sprang forward and opened it.

Together entered four stalwart youths accoutred in the military fashion of the day—Otto and Joris, looking like twin brethren, so exactly were they alike in figure and face, leading the way, Harold and Malcolm bringing up the rear. The Van der Hammer brothers were more strongly built, and had greater depth of chest and strength of limb, than their English comrades; but Harold was the tallest of the four, and was a very handsome fellow, giving promise of being very like his brother Lionel as he grew and matured; whilst Malcolm was slight and of medium height, though as sinewy and muscular as a race-horse. He had

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fair hair and gray eyes, and a face of quick and keen intelligence. His movements were singularly rapid, and he was noted already in his troop as being the swiftest runner, the best swimmer, and the most agile climber amongst them. In the amphibious and strategic warfare of the Middle Ages, especially in such countries as Holland and Belgium, these points were of no small advantage, and Malcolm had several times distinguished himself above men of stronger mould. He was when at home the life of the house, having always some amusing story to tell or some joke to crack with those about him. He was the light of his mother's eyes, and never went forth or came in without the exchange of some caress or fond word—albeit that kind of affectionate intimacy between parents and children was something unusual in those days.

He crossed the room now with his light, springing step, and bent his knee before his mother's chair. She laid her hand softly on his fair head as she said with a smile,—

"So thou hast returned safe and sound, my son?"

"Yes, verily; but none so glad of heart for the news abroad. I had hoped to hear that on the morrow we should be all turned out to mount guard over the sappers and miners, who should be making breaches in the Blawgaren and Kowenstyn dikes. But the fools are ringing the bells, forsooth, because there is to be nothing done, and because the beasts may fatten and batten in peace! In peace, quotha! If we do not look well to it, men and beasts will alike perish by thousands on those fertile plains where the salt waters ought to be rolling. Methought our

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Burgomaster would have been a match for those fat, greasy butchers!"

Coosje uttered a soft laugh at this description of her townsmen, whilst the three little children of Lionel and Roosje, who had come in at the sound of the soldiers' return, and were gathering round the Van der Hammer grand-parents as usual, looked curiously at their tall uncles to ask,—

"Are they going to make our town into an island? Mother said perhaps we should soon see the great waves rolling all round it. We should like that. Are they going to make the sea come to us?"

"I fear me not, my children," answered the grandfather, "I fear me not. A wise head has counselled; but there be other heads and blunter wits at work, and I fear me the voice of the many foolish will prevail over that of the few wise. Were our city to be turned for the nonce into a great island, whither the fleets of the brave Zeelanders could come and go at will, and where our ships, in conjunction with theirs, could muster together for one great battle with the Spanish Prince at Kalloo, I trow he and his picked soldiers would soon find they must run for their very lives before us, and we should drive them back whence they came, and prove to them that Antwerp is too hard a nut for them to crack. If the Prince of Orange would come himself to Antwerp, and meet the citizens face to face, methinks he might even now persuade them. But none other than he would be equal to the task."

"Vader," said Maurice, suddenly rousing himself from a

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deep reverie into which he had fallen, "I had a dream yesternight; it has weighed upon me all this past day. Heaven send it come not to pass!"

All in the room turned to look anxiously at Maurice. The dreamy-eyed lad with the thin, sensitive face, the quick colour that came and went in his cheeks, and the brow that spoke of imagination and enthusiastic devotion, had possessed from childhood a strange and "uncanny" gift. He would from time to time be visited with a dream-like trance, in which certain things passed before his sleeping senses; and these dreams had invariably been followed by disaster to the person whom he had seen whilst under the spell of that strange sleep. During these past years of stress and peril and warfare, many dear friends and near kinsmen had been snatched away by the hand of death, although the double household itself had been marvellously preserved from loss of its members; and many times before some misfortune had happened to one that they knew and loved, Maurice had told his mother or some member of the family of a strange dream, in which he had seen that same person move and play a part, but always with a black halo about his head. The boy had grown to dread his own dreams, and when visited by one would feel depressed and ill at ease. It had been some time now since he had been visited by one, and he had hoped the spell was broken; but it seemed that this was not so, and all in the room turned to look at him, the women clasping their hands and murmuring words of prayer that their own family circle might not be broken up.

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"My son," said Van der Hammer slowly, "if thou hast said so much thou hadst best tell us more. It may be that these visions are granted to thee to serve as a warning to those thou lovest. When thou speakest of a dream, thou dost mean one of those strange visions of thine which differ from an ordinary dream?"

"Ay, as light from darkness. Father, I vowed I would keep it to myself and say naught to disturb the peace of the house, for no face of any friend or kinsman came before me. I seemed to see into some great room where men of rank and noble birth were met together for discussion. I saw amongst the assembly the face of our Burgomaster, the Lord of Sainte Aldegonde. He was sitting near to a man of noble presence and eagle eye, and I knew that this man was none other than our great Prince of Orange; and I bent my gaze upon him closer and closer, striving to catch the words he spoke,—for his lips moved, and I knew that he was speaking. And even as I watched I saw the black halo form itself about his head, and I gave such a cry that I awoke out of sleep, for it was as though I had seen the death-angel drive his sword into his heart."

There was an inarticulate murmur in the room. Several of the women turned pale, and Maud sprang to her feet, white and trembling.

"Not the Prince—not our great Prince! Ach, Maurice, say that it was not he! If he were to be taken from us the cause of liberty would be lost for ever."

It was strange, perhaps, what consternation was produced in that room by the recital of this lad's dream; but

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so it was—even the children cowering together at their grandam's knee and looking with frightened eyes into her face.

"I would I could say it were not he," answered Maurice, in a low tone; "but I know that face too well to be mistaken. And the dream was repeated thrice, and each time the black shadow about the head was deeper and denser. I would not let myself sleep again, but rose before the dawn to wander forth through the sleeping city and strive to forget the horror of it. Father, where is the Prince now? There is little fighting of import going on. Can he be in any grievous peril?"

"The Prince is at his house at Delft," answered Van der Hammer. "His little son has just been christened there; and our Burgomaster was present, as you know, at that ceremony, and has returned thence with this urgent counsel from the Prince anent this matter of the dike. Methinks scarce ever in his stormy career has the Prince been more safe than at this time."

"And I may think of my dream as but an idle fantasy," cried Maurice, with impetuous eagerness—"the fantasy of a fevered brain; for all these past days we have been thinking, thinking, thinking—first of the city, then of the dikes, then of the Prince and his words—till it has fairly got upon my brain. Say, *mijn vader*, may I think of it as a diseased fantasy of the brain?"

"My son," was the grave response, "there be some matters upon which it behoves us not to speak with too great assurance. There be mysteries surrounding this

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little span of our human life into which we must not seek too closely to pry. The good God has given to His children various gifts, and it is not for us to despise or disregard these same gifts, even though we might fain have been without them. Thou knowest how even now, through a dream of thine, great hurt to the family of our good friends Meetkercke was averted, and many lives saved. Wherefore seek not too much to fight against what gives thee pain to see. I would we could send a message of warning to the Prince, that some peril he recks not of may lie athwart his path; but I fear were we to speak only of the dream of a jonkher like our Maurice, he would but receive it with a smile."

"He has lived a life of peril so long that danger seems his meat and drink," said Lionel. "He has escaped so many thrusts that men say he bears a charmed life; and yet I would Maurice had seen any head but his with the black halo about it."

"My children," said the elder Wilford, with something of solemnity in his tone, "if we may not have the power to do aught by a message of warning that would scarce be listened to if it reached the ears of the intrepid warrior-Prince, we may yet help him by our prayers. And here in the city of Antwerp we have still liberty to meet together to pray to God in our own tongue, and to hear the holy words of promise and comfort given in the Scriptures. If calamity be hard at hand; if the hand which guides the helm of state is to be taken away; if dark clouds are settling over the horizon, and our right to meet

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together in our own houses for prayer and praise be threatened, let us not lose our privileges whilst they are still ours. Let us call together our best friends, and ask them to join with us in an especial manner to pray for the Prince, and for the righteous cause in which the best years of his life have been spent. We can at least do that, if we can do nothing else; and it is meet and right we should make known our requests unto God, as He has bidden us."

There was a unanimous and eager assent to this proposition, and before long a goodly number of burgher-citizens had assembled in the long family apartment in Hooch Straet. Such assemblies were by no means rare in that house, for a copy of the entire Bible in the native tongue was to be found there; and those who possessed only fragments of the Scriptures, and had not all skill to read what they possessed, gladly came to hear them read and expounded by those better instructed; and both Thomas Wilford and the elder Van der Hammer were excellent readers, and had a decided gift both for exposition and prayer.

And now, when the city of Antwerp was once again seriously threatened by the fires of the Inquisition and the cruel tyranny of the Spanish rule, it seemed natural for the people to desire to meet often together whilst they might, to read and to pray, and to discuss those very subjects about which to think might soon be death. The more thoughtful of the inhabitants of the city, knowing the strength of Spain, the relentless tenacity of purpose that

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characterized Philip the Second, and the brilliant genius of the Prince of Parma, by no means shared the turbulent, defiant spirit of the bulk of the citizens, and were far more disposed to listen to counsels of prudence, and respond to any suggestions from their great champion, than to trust blindly in their own strength and believe themselves invincible. Many hundreds of them remembered too well the bloody Spanish Fury under Alva. Although the Prince of Parma had shown himself a man of vastly different calibre from his bloody predecessor, it was yet impossible to forget that the soldiers under him were of the hated Spanish race, and that a general could not always hold their savage passions in check, however much he might desire it. Antwerp had fallen once; it was impossible, therefore, to deny that it might fall again. And though the wise minority were overborne in the present by the turbulent and hot-headed majority, they had not given up hope of being able even yet to bring the bulk of the citizens to a more reasonable frame of mind. Meantime to meet together for prayer, and to appoint a day of fasting and humiliation to be observed by those who realized the gravity of the situation, seemed a right and natural thing; and the room in Hooch Straet was quickly crowded with grave-faced men and women, all deeply conscious that the times in which they moved were times of deepest importance and of very great peril.

Earnest indeed were the prayers offered up for the distracted country, and for the great Prince upon whose life so much seemed to hang. Maurice's dream of evil

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import was whispered about from one to another, and heads were gravely shaken, for many there present had reason to remember some strange and fatal fulfilment of a like dream.

"If the Prince were to be taken away, the cause of freedom and religion must surely be lost to us," said more than one voice; but as that whisper reached the ears of the Wilford father, he rose up in his seat with intent to speak, and a hush fell upon the room.

"My friends," he said, speaking in the Dutch tongue, which was as familiar to him as his own language, "I scarce think that that is the fashion in which our God would have us think or speak. Has He not given us command not to put our trust in princes nor in any child of man; nay, not though He Himself raise up those princes to be our help in times of trouble? They are instruments in His hand, and as such we value and revere them; yet we must ever remember that they are but instruments, and not learn to look upon them as the saviours of the people. There is one only Saviour, one only Prince and Lord. The King of kings is our shield and defence, and to Him we must look when the clouds and tempest seem most ready to overwhelm us. That is the thought which should ever be present with us when we think with shrinking and fear of seeing our earthly rulers taken from us. In our prayers we are ready enough to acknowledge that God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. We boldly stand forth and declare that we will not fear though the tempests

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rage and swell, and the mountains be removed into the midst of the sea. We declare with one voice that the Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge. And should these words be heard only in our acts of prayer and praise? Ought not their spirit to be breathed forth in our daily life? Ought not we to exhibit day by day, in face of all peril which may come to us, that steadfast confidence in the Lord's sovereign power we are so ready to testify to with our lips? Is our testimony to be of the lips only? Is our faith only assumed whilst we kneel and pray to God? Is it not strong enough to go forth with us into the stress of the world without, and to keep us calm in the midst of many terrors? We know not what God's providence may have in store for us—we know not what trials He may see fit to send us; but so long as we look first to Him, and only secondly to those men He has raised up in His mercy to be our rulers and counsellors, then we need not lose heart or courage whatever may betide us. He is the Lord of earth as well as of the heavens. Upon Him should our hopes and our hearts be set, and then most assuredly we need not fear though our earthly props may be taken away, and we may seem for a moment to be as a bark without a helmsman. God will not desert us as long as we trust in Him. That should be our help and stay even in the darkest hour of the night."

These words were received with a murmur of assent, and the little meeting broke up cheered and comforted. It needed some such reminders from time to time to keep even these members of the reformed flock from sinking

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down into a blind trust in their leaders, rather than in the justice of their cause and the support they always looked to receive from God. The past few years, during which they had enjoyed freedom of religious opinion, had not been years of unmixed advance. There had been time for divisions and jealousies to arise between the different factions even amongst those who held mainly the same views, and though in moments of danger they would mass together as of old, there was a good deal of bickering at other times, and a decided tendency towards that lukewarmness which had led so many of the lower Provinces to permit themselves to be placed again beneath the Spanish yoke, even after they had tasted something of the sweets of freedom. The weariness of the long struggle sapped away the resolution of some, belief in the delusive promises of Spain blinded the eyes of others, and treachery within the walls had given back many a fair city to slavery that had won its way to freedom through rivers of blood.

Would Antwerp show a like spirit? That was the question ceaselessly exercising the minds of the most thoughtful of her citizens. Her position was critical to the last degree, even more so than she realized herself; and with her would fall the whole of Flanders and Brabant, leaving only Holland and Zeeland to oppose a frail bulwark to the resistless might of Spain. And should another blow fall upon the devoted Provinces in the death of their great Prince, whose life was being ceaselessly sought by the tyrant of the Escorial, it might well be that

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despair would paralyze the whole population, left suddenly without their head; wherefore it was well that men should remind each other of the too-often-forgotten fact that in God's hands rest the final issues of all such struggles, and that men are but His instruments, to be used for the furtherance of His great purposes.

"I am glad thou didst speak so, brother Wilford," said Van der Hammer, when their guests had dispersed, and the women were laying the long table for supper. "For whether or not there be trouble coming upon us, it is well from time to time to hear such words. We are all frail creatures, prone to forget God in man. It is right that we should be reminded that though we are all called upon to do our utmost in the righteous cause, yet that God is in our midst, working for and with us. If we should either now or at some future time lose our great champion, we must not yield to despair on that account; and we must strive to do all we may to infuse courage into those about us. Son Maurice, thou shalt be set a task before the next Sabbath, when our friends will meet with us again. Thou hast a pretty gift for music. Thou shalt make us a new hymn to sing; and thou shalt take for thy theme these stirring words, 'The Lord is a Man of War; Jehovah is His Name.'"

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CHAPTER III.

EVIL TIDINGS.

"*WAR'S END,* forsooth!" sneered the little wizened old man with the dark Italian face who sat poring over a great tome by the light of a lamp of extraordinary brilliance. Call it rather the *Folly of Antwerp;* for it is the biggest folly they have committed yet, and that is not saying a small thing."

"Well, Signor Gianibelli, I only tell you what is told me," answered Malcolm Wilford, laughing. "All the city says that when once she is afloat she will chase the Spaniards out of the land, and put an end to the war. I went to have a look at her lying in the dock. She will be a monster when she is finished; and is to be made shot-proof, so that no hurt can come to her from the fire of the enemy. Her own guns will riddle the foe, whilst none can touch her. Her bulwarks are ten feet thick, and she will be able to carry one thousand men upon her."

The sneer slowly deepened on the subtle face of the weird-looking old man.

"And she will cost money enough to victual the city for months; and when she is done she will but prove the

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folly of her contrivers. Bah, boy! talk not to me of your clumsy Antwerp devices. Your citizens have as much brain amongst them as would serve one hen to bring up a brood of chickens! *War's End,* forsooth! The *Beginning of Blunders* would be a better name."

Malcolm laughed. He dearly loved "drawing" the irritable little Italian mechanician, with whom he had somehow contrived to establish something like friendly relations. This queer old foreigner, who had lived several years in the city of Antwerp, was a man of wonderful genius; but was accounted by some a dreamer, and by others a sorcerer, whilst his very existence was unknown to the world at large, though a day was at hand when every soul in the city should have heard his name. He was a man of invention and of extraordinary ingenuity; but had met the usual fate of his class, had been sneered at and flouted, and had had the mortification of hearing his treasured schemes made light of and his inventions thrust incredulously aside. He had been a great traveller, and had been not long ago as far as the Spanish court at Madrid, striving to get audience of the King; but disgusted by the treatment he received from the proud courtiers, he had at length retired in dudgeon and despair, and was now living quietly at Antwerp, brooding over his wrongs, wrapped up in a hundred various ingenious plans, and steadily resolved to be revenged upon the Spaniards if fate should give him his chance. He had no love for the people amongst whom he lived. He sneered at the dull wits of the Dutch as much as he raved at the proud insolence

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of the Spaniards. There was no spark of patriotism or love of liberty in the man. He would strike a blow for Antwerp when the time came, if he could, but from private pique rather than public spirit. He had made many enemies in the town and hardly one friend. His neighbours feared him, accounting him a wizard, and were polite out of sheer fear. But Malcolm was the only being who came in and out of that queer little triangular house wedged in between Closter Straet and the narrow thoroughfare of Crommenellebogh, hardly a stone's throw from his own abode in Hooch Straet, though it seemed almost a different world, so dim and dark was it, and full of strange odours and mysterious tools.

The old man always sitting over his books, or with some strange bit of mechanism before him, was in himself a study, and one which a painter would have delighted to portray on canvas, as the light from the lamp threw the eager face into intense relief from the blackness that surrounded him.

It was a strange face, full of subtlety and power—the parchment-like skin drawn tightly over the sharp features, and puckered into a network of minute wrinkles about the eyes and temples, the sunken cheeks, the glittering eyes as black as night and full of sombre fire, and the cold, sneering mouth, thin-lipped and compressed, seeming to speak of an iron will and powers of immense concentration. The hair was not grizzled, but was raven black sprinkled freely with silver. It grew very luxuriantly, and gave a leonine wildness to the aspect of the head.

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Self-controlled and sneeringly calm as was this man generally, he was subject to wild outbreaks of passion when his wrath was stirred—fury-fits that once witnessed were never forgotten. Something in the expression of the face suggested the idea of fierce passions kept under stern control; but Malcolm never talked long to the old Italian without being reminded of a volcano that might look peaceful and harmless to the outward eye, and yet would suddenly spout forth burning lava and fierce flames.

To tell the whole truth, Malcolm might scarcely have striven as he had done to win his way with this strange old man had it not been for the fact that Gianibelli possessed a daughter, the one and only being he appeared ever to have loved (for of his wife he never spoke, and even the girl had never extracted a single word from him about the mother she could not remember), and for whom, in his peculiar wayward fashion, he certainly entertained a considerable amount of affection—that is, when his occupations left him time to think of the domestic side of life.

Veronica was a girl well fitted to make the sunshine of her strange and lonely home. She was a wonderfully radiant young creature, with something of her father's intense brilliance of eye, but with features all her own, sweet as well as noble, winsome as well as dignified. She had a broad, thoughtful brow, exquisitely-chiselled features, a complexion of a clear olive tint that in moments of excitement took a rich damask bloom, and lips that quivered and varied in expression with every varying emotion, and seemed made for kisses, as Malcolm failed

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not to tell her, when once he knew that his ardent love was returned, and that the heart he had so long striven to win was truly his own.

But things had gone no further with the young people than a mutual confession of love. It was scarce the time to think of marrying or giving in marriage in these stormy, troubled days, and Veronica well knew that her father would simply fly off into one of his wild fits of fury if Malcolm were to ask her hand in wedlock. Indeed, she plainly told her lover that she saw no hope of ever being able to be his; but of course the ardent youth was in no wise daunted by such a fear, and plainly told her he would serve for her like Jacob for Rachel, but that he would have her at the last, father or no father.

And she listened with a smile, making light, as did he, of the needful days of waiting,—strong in their hope, their happiness, and their love. It seemed so easy to wait when they might see each other daily. And as Malcolm passed day by day down the Closter Straet on his way to the Citadel, he never failed to catch the sparkle of Veronica's bright eyes, and knew that she was looking for him, and was proud of his martial air and soldier-like trappings.

Whether the old father knew what was passing beneath his very eyes the lovers neither knew nor cared. Malcolm was welcome to drop in for a chat whenever he chose, and there was a seat at the frugal board for him if he chose to remain for the simple meal of vegetable and soup which was the ordinary repast of the Italian and his daughter. Veronica was a cook of no small skill, and

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beneath her hands the simple viands took a flavour which often made Malcolm marvel.

"We shall fatten when you are all starving," the old man would say sometimes, with his grim, sneering smile. "You fat, greedy Dutch must live always like fighting-cocks, else your courage ebbs as fast as the tide of the Scheldt. Wait till Parma has built his bridge, and you will see."

Malcolm never argued with the subtle Italian, always knowing he should be worsted if he tried, though he might have cited many noble cases where starving cities had held out in the teeth of fearful privations against the tyranny of the Spanish arms. But the youth himself was not so confident as he would fain have been as to the temper of his own townsmen. There was something selfish in the democracy of Antwerp, as had been abundantly shown before now. Fight they might, and fiercely and well; but suffer? Ah, there was the rub! Malcolm was not sure how they would behave should famine and dearth stalk abroad through the streets.

But that Antwerp was not going to submit tamely to the foreign yoke was exemplified in a dozen different ways; and now all the citizens were running wild with enthusiasm over this great floating monster, which was already named the *War's End*, and was to be strong enough to bombard Parma's chimerical bridge (when it should be built) and scatter it to the four winds of heaven.

Even Malcolm, who had had his doubts as to the seaworthiness of this monster ship when first he heard of

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it, had been carried away by the idea that it would really serve some great purpose, and he argued the point still with the Italian, though in a jocular fashion. Veronica passed in and out of the little chamber, coming in for a snatch of talk between her various household duties, when suddenly they became aware of some excitement in the streets, and Malcolm stepped out to find everybody running helter-skelter down the Crommenellebogh in the direction of the Hoy Kay.

"What is it?" asked Veronica, with her hand upon his arm. "What is happening thus to move the people? Malcolm *caro*, run not into peril, if peril be abroad; or take me with thee an thou goest. I would know myself what has befallen."

It was no very unwonted thing for there to be seen these eager crowds of hurrying citizens hastening down towards the river's edge. In times of ceaseless skirmishing, and of attack and menace, hardly a day passed without something to arouse excitement, were it but for an hour. There had been the sound of guns heard in the city that day from the direction of the forts of Lillo and Liefkenshoek—twin fortresses held by the patriots, facing each other some way down the river, built upon the great dikes, and guarding the city from the approach of hostile vessels. The brave Teligny commanded the former place, and Colonel John Pettin of Arras the latter. The possession of these two forts was, as may well be seen, of the first importance to the city of Antwerp, and it was no surprise to the citizens to hear firing from their neighbour-

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hood. There was ceaseless skirmishing warfare kept up by the belligerent armies drawing their circles closer and closer about the central spot—the queenly city upon whose fate so much depended—and the sounds alone had not aroused any alarm in the breasts of the people.

But that some news of no small importance had been brought in now was evident. On all faces was stamped a look of expectation and of dismay. It was plain that evil tidings had reached the place.

"What is it?" asked Malcolm anxiously of one and another; but nobody seemed able to answer the question, and the only word he could catch as it passed from mouth to mouth through the hurrying throng was—

"Liefkenshoek! Liefkenshoek!"

"Heaven send we have not lost Liefkenshoek!" cried the youth, with a face of grave anxiety, as he turned towards Veronica and gently pushed her within doors. "Stay there, my beloved. I will down to the quay and learn the news, and will return with it to thee anon. Thy father would not wish thee to mingle with yon hurrying crowd. I will not be long in coming back to thee."

Veronica reluctantly let him go. She would not have feared had she been at his side, but she was fearful of peril for him when she was no longer able to see him. With that high courage which often accompanies a sensitive and imaginative spirit, she would have dared any danger, so that they shared it together. She wished in her heart that, if the net did close around Antwerp, its women as well as its men might join in the defence,

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as had many times been done ere now during the years of bloodshed that had just rolled by. By Malcolm's side she would face anything. It was seeing him go forth alone to danger and perhaps to death that she found so unspeakably hard.

"What is all that coil in the streets, girl?" asked the old man's voice from within. "Stand thou not there by the open door, Veronica. Thou art no longer a child; thou must learn modesty and discretion. Come in, and close the door and the shutters; yon tumult disturbs me."

Veronica obeyed, though with reluctance. She was keenly interested in every vicissitude that befell the city of their adoption. She had lived five years in Antwerp, and the greatest happiness of her life had come to her there. Roman Catholic by training though she was, she was an ardent advocate of the cause of liberty; and since Malcolm had begun to talk with her upon the matters connected with his faith, she had begun to weave together the old traditions and the new, and to find in them almost as much of harmony as of discord; rather to her own surprise, for she had been brought up to look upon them as creeds at deadly variance.

"What new folly is on foot now?" quoth the old man, with his ready sneer. "When we live in a city of fools, we must put up with these nightly and daily outbreaks of folly. What are they saying now, child?"

"I know not, father; I can only hear them speak of Liefkenshoek. I misdoubt if the people who cry out know what has befallen. Why, *padre mio*, what ails thee?"

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For the old man had risen quickly from his seat with a strange glitter in his eye.

"Fools! fools!" he cried aloud, in his mocking voice. "Did not I say so? did not I warn them?"

"Warn them of what, my father?"

"That their fortifications there were incomplete; that upon the Flemish side a breach could easily be made; that if the place were to be held against the great Parma, more work must be done there. Yea, I told it them—and they laughed. Fools! fools! they ever do laugh when words of wisdom be spoken to them. Have they not ever derided me when I have opened my lips, even as they are scorning now the counsel of the one man in this distracted country of fools whose word is worth listening to? If they have lost Liefkenshoek, they have but themselves to thank. Ho, ho! if this be the way Antwerp sets to work to repel the besieging foe, a fine spectacle will she give the world before all be over! If these things be done in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?" And the old man's subtle face took a look which made Veronica shrink slightly; for although she loved and reverenced her father, she did not love this wild vein of scornful cynicism which always seemed to make him delight in the misfortunes that overtook others, even though those others were nominally his friends.

"It may not be so bad as that," she answered gently. "Perchance there has been some attack upon Liefkenshoek. But Malcolm promised to come back anon with the news."

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Gianibelli grunted as he returned to his heavy tome, but was not displeased at this, for he was eager after news, even though assuming indifference towards it. Veronica listened intently for the sound of returning footsteps, and sprang to open the door before Malcolm had had time to knock for admittance. She knew his step amongst a hundred, and her quick ears gave her warning of his approach before he reached the threshold. He came in looking very grave, his face pale with anger and mortification. Veronica saw at a glance that he was the bearer of evil tidings.

"It is too true," he said in a low voice: "the Spaniards have carried Liefkenshoek at a blow. Scarce twenty men out of the eight hundred there have escaped to tell the tale. O my God! what have we done to deserve such terrible misfortune? Liefkenshoek—darling's corner! Well, our darling fortress has cost us dear—eight hundred of our bravest soldiers put to the sword, and the Spanish flag waving above the ramparts!"

"I knew it! I knew it!" cried the Italian, in a strange tone of mingled exultation and scorn. "Did I not say that the fortifications were incomplete?"

"Ay, verily you did," answered Malcolm, with a bitter sigh; "and it only adds a poignancy to the blow to know that the fault lies at home. It was that weak place, which was known to but ignored by our foolhardy burgesses, that has been our undoing. They say that the Prince of Parma reconnoitred the fort in person; and to-day the Marquis of Richebourg, with a hundred picked

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veterans, made a dash upon the weak spot, took it by surprise, and was quickly followed by the whole regiment. All who were not slain within the walls were chased along the dike and either killed by the sword or drowned in the sullen waters. Scarce twenty men have escaped, wounded and bleeding, to tell the evil news in the city. They say that the brave Colonel Pettin has been carried to the Prince of Parma. But there is a rumour rife that the Marquis stabbed him to the heart with his own hand. Heaven help this distracted city if troubles like these are to fall upon her, and no head wise enough to direct her or hand strong enough to hold the reins!"

"In sooth it needs a strong hand to hold the reins when there be a team of wild horses to drive, all pulling different ways!" said the Italian, with his peculiar sneering smile. "There is but one hand which could accomplish that task; and if Antwerp be wise, instead of the city of fools she loves to show herself, she will send an earnest deputation to the Prince of Orange, imploring him to come in person to her, if but for one week, to examine into all things personally himself, and try to set matters going in the right direction, without this everlasting conflict of opinion, which will be the ruin of the cause if it be not suppressed. Indeed I would he would come; it would give all Antwerp hope and enthusiasm to see his grave face and stately figure again."

There was a malicious gleam in Gianibelli's eyes as he went on with his speech, which was rather a monologue than an attempt at conversation.

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"You lovers of freedom, who will naught either of King or Pope, but will think for yourselves, govern yourselves, worship for yourselves, are finding out, by slow and sure degrees, that you are but changing one tyrant for many; one faith for a thousand petty beliefs, no two alike; order for confusion, rule for anarchy. Oh yes, my young friend, you may colour and bite your lip, but you will find my words are true. Look at this distracted city. She owns the sway neither of King nor of Pope, and what has she gained thereby? She is governed by a hydra-headed monster that knows not good from evil, light from darkness, wisdom from folly. She is swayed by a maddened and inflamed crowd, all thinking differently, all acting for self and not for the public weal. Mark my words, young soldier of the republic, Antwerp will fall, and she will deserve her fate. No man ever yet was fit to rule who had not learned how to submit himself first to the powers that be. Antwerp will fall because that she strives to run ere she can walk; she throws off the rightful rule of those above her ere she knows one fragment of the art of self-government. Blind in her folly, mad in her arrogance, she is courting her own destruction; and unless she summons to her aid the one man who could save her from herself, she falls!"

Malcolm walked homewards in no small depression of spirit, with these words of evil omen ringing in his ears. It was not that he believed, as some of his townsfolk certainly did, that Gianibelli was a sorcerer, and had dealings with the devil which gave him power to read the secrets

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of the future. But he was well assured that the subtle-minded and keen-witted Italian possessed gifts both of insight and judgment far in advance of the majority of men; hence anything which passed his lips came with a semblance of authority, although in his moments of excitement and rage he generally spoke a good deal more than he meant.

"Antwerp will fall! Antwerp will fall!" The words seemed to ring like a knell in his head; and when he reached home he found that the evil news had already preceded him. Grave anxiety was upon every face. The two fathers were talking together in low and anxious tones; the women were pale and tearful; Lionel's face was set and stern; whilst Otto and Joris were working away polishing their arms with a look of resolve upon their faces that seemed to imply some settled purpose; and Maud came forward as Malcolm appeared, her face flushed and excited, crying as she took him by the arm,—

"O Malcolm, hast heard the news? Liefkenshoek has fallen to the enemy; and to-morrow Joris and Otto and their company go to Lillo to join Teligny's young bachelors there. Every one is saying that Mondragon will storm Lillo next; and if that falls too, Antwerp is lost indeed!"

"Join Count Teligny in Fort Lillo! marry, a good thought," cried Malcolm, whose young blood was tingling to be up and doing. "I will forth with them too.—Harold, art thou not going likewise? I would I could be in half a hundred places at once, so I could meet the Spaniards face to face in all!"

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"Gently, lad, gently," answered Lionel, smiling as he patted his impetuous brother's shoulder; "we must not rob the city of too many of her most willing soldiers. With the enemy safely ensconced at Kalloo, and his forts rising, day by day, as if by magic around us, we must be ready for assault at home as well as abroad. We must not too greatly drain the resources of the city. We are sending one company to reinforce Fort Lillo, which is certain to be the next point attacked; and it chances that it is the company in which Joris and Otto are enrolled. Thy turn will come another day, my boy; thou mayest be very sure of that. This siege of our city will not end before we have all of us fought hand to hand with our foes, and have tested the mettle of which we are made in the face of cold Spanish steel."

"God preserve us all!" spoke the juffrouw Van der Hammer, as she gave a shuddering glance round at the circle of loved faces about her. Well did she remember those awful days, not yet ten years since, when the Spaniards had wrecked the fair city of Antwerp amid scenes of indescribable horror. Their own house had escaped as by a miracle; and the children had been all sent out of the city before the commencement of the siege, that they might escape the privations their elders were content to suffer in the good cause; so that they had not witnessed the horrors which, however, they had heard so often described that they seemed to be as well acquainted with them as their parents. Under the milder rule of the Prince of Parma, Alva's atrocities were not like to be repeated, and

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Antwerp was perhaps something over-secure in her confidence of being able to resist the threatened doom of capture; but the women quaked and felt a qualm of fear at every whisper of evil tidings, and to-night all faces were grave and all hearts heavy. But those who were going forth to join the fray and stand in the forefront of the battle showed the most joyous air, and spoke confidently of winning back the captured fort when once Mondragon should have been defeated before the walls of Lillo.

"If this calamity would but bring the Prince in person to Antwerp!" said Malcolm; and many were the exclamations of hope that this might indeed be the case.

Alas, alas! they little knew that the strong hand which was so sorely needed to hold the reins of government was already stiff and cold in death, and that the noble heart which had resisted all allurements, scorned all bribes and all threats, and been true in the noblest way to the cause of freedom, had already ceased to beat!

Unhappy Antwerp! robbed at the most critical moment of her history of the one being whose name yet overbore in some sort the self-will of the selfish masses,—whom all Antwerpers revered and loved; who might, by his personal presence and influence, have yet conquered her stubborn short-sightedness and roused her to the true patriotism which breathed in his own life. But it was not to be.

Early the next morning, whilst the sun was rising over the city, the inhabitants were startled from their tardy sleep, after the excitements of the evening, by the solemn tolling of the great bell of Our Lady, and the mournful

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note was quickly answered from the various other churches scattered up and down Antwerp.

As the first of those doleful notes struck on the ears of young Maurice, who shared the sleeping-chamber of his comrade Malcolm, the boy sprang up in his bed with a low cry of bitter despair.

"It has come! it has come!" he cried. "The doom! the doom!" and jumping up, he commenced to dress himself with all the haste his trembling hands could make, Malcolm following his example without a word.

Hastening out into the street, they found themselves joined by pale-faced inquirers from many another house. Nobody knew at first the meaning of the ceaseless tolling, but that it boded ill to Antwerp none might doubt; and as the running groups made their way rapidly into the open space about the great Cathedral, they heard a sound of weeping and wailing, and came upon a sight that was never forgotten by any who witnessed it.

A reeking horse stood with drooping head in the centre of the square, sniffing at, without touching, the fodder some humane person had brought for it, though the empty pail beside it showed that its thirst had been assuaged; and sitting yet in the saddle, as though the energy to dismount was lacking him, was a man in courtier's garb, though stained and spotted with the haste of a rapid journey without due preparation.

His face was white and his eyes were bloodshot. There was that in his aspect which struck terror and dismay into the hearts of all who approached him; and as the throng

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kept shifting and changing, as those who had heard the fearful tidings moved away to let others take their place, he kept repeating his story in a strangely dull, mechanical way, as though even the power of thought were lost.

"Dead! dead! dead! Shot to the heart by the hand of an assassin! 'O my God, have mercy on this poor people!'—his last words, as I can testify, for I was but ten yards from him as he fell. The Prince, the Prince, the noble Prince—the father of his people! God in heaven look down and avenge his death! Gone in a moment—dead almost ere we could lift him! O my God, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us!"

The voice of the crowd took up that note of prayer, and amidst the tolling of the bell, and the wild, stormy weeping of men who had perhaps never shed a tear in their lives before, there went up as with one voice the supplication of a great multitude,—

"God have mercy upon us! Christ have mercy upon us!"

The awe-stricken, white-faced throng looked each other in the face, scarcely able to believe the fearful story true. Their Prince and leader taken from them—the one man who seemed able to cope with the tyrant of Spain, and to guide the troubled bark of national freedom through the stormy waters which threatened to overwhelm it! Could it be true? Surely it was all some horrid dream! Malcolm felt young Maurice stagger against him, and threw his arm about the boy, for he had turned as white as death.

"Come, let us go home," he said; "we have learned all

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too much as it is. Ah, Maurice, Maurice, that dream of thine was but too true!"

"Speak not of it—let us get home!" gasped the younger lad, altogether unnerved by the tragic solemnity of the scene he had witnessed; and Malcolm was glad to clear a passage through the crowd for his companion, and see him safe to the sheltering door of home.

Doors and windows all down the Hooch Straet stood open wide, and pale-faced men and women were coming crowding out.

"It is not true! say it is not true!" cried Maud, dashing forward, as her brother and his companion appeared. But Maurice's death-like face and Malcolm's tear-dimmed eyes told a tale that could not be misread, and with a low cry as of despair the girl covered her face with her hands and fled within again.

Strong men were not ashamed to weep for one who had been as a father, not to them alone, but to the cause to which their hearts were pledged, and in which their very beings were wrapped up. Both the fathers of the double family were striving to speak, though sobs strangled the words they would fain have uttered, and the women and children were weeping aloud as though for some near and dear one. As though by magic, the whole city was clothed in black. Men who had never spoken before—who were strangers to each other—stopped in the streets to mourn together him who was lost, or enter side by side a church to join in some service wherein the people remembered the virtues of him who was gone, and implored the help and

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protection of the God of heaven for them in their hour of need. The Roman Catholics knelt before their shrines and prayed to their saints for him who was gone; for hundreds and thousands of these Romanists, though differing from the Prince in religious matters, were heart and soul with the cause of freedom, and honoured and revered its champion as much as those of his own religious principles. Throughout the place was there nothing to be heard save the voice of weeping and wailing. It was a day that all the land had cause to remember, the memory of which was never obliterated even by the stirring scenes which followed.

Lionel was out all day on his various duties; but coming in at night with a wearied and harassed air, he brought tidings that had in them something of comfort.

"We are not going to yield to despair—thank Heaven for that!" he said, as he met the anxious eyes of the two elder men bent upon him. "There was but one voice in the Council to-day, and that voice was, 'War to the death!' —war against tyranny and oppression, war against those whose devilish plots have caused the death of Europe's greatest man. To avenge that death shall be our sacred duty; and yon assassin in his secret chamber, surrounded by his slaves and minions, shall have reason to tremble, thousands of miles away, for the rage and fury he has kindled in the hearts of this people to-day. William of Orange shall be avenged! a thousand hearts have sworn it!"

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CHAPTER IV.

THE COMING STRIFE.

MEN went about in those days with set, stern faces. The blow which had laid the great Prince in the grave had struck home also to the hearts of the people, and the universal mourning was a strange and impressive sight to see. But if the people all mourned as one man, as one man, too, they resolved not to abandon in despair the cause for which their "father," as they loved to call him, had laid down his life. From every city came the news of the same patriotic resolve—to stand to their colours; to avenge the death of their head by a fuller measure of resistance to the foe against whom he had been pledged; to rob the Spanish tyrant of the fruit of his base triumph; and to show him that though William the Silent was dead, his spirit yet lived and worked in those he had left behind him.

When news reached Antwerp of the fearful doom inflicted on the assassin, men listened in stern approval; and if these things showed that it was not the Spaniards alone who understood the art of cruelty, there were few who expressed horror at the fate of the miscreant or blamed

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his executioners. The feeling of the nation was that no fate could be bad enough for him who had slain their father.

But the cruel death of the assassin could not restore their leader to them; and soon was Antwerp to feel the loss she had sustained, for there was none now able to control the lawless passions and turbulent quarrels of the nobility—the great men upon whom the control of affairs now fell; and eager as the majority were to forward the good cause, there were a thousand differences and difficulties continually arising which no one had authority to arrange or allay.

Antwerp was speedily to feel the loss of the great Prince in the procrastination and insubordination of Admiral Treslong.

There was now no doubt that Parma meant seriously to set about the siege of the city, and therefore it was of the first importance that the place should be properly victualled. Sainte Aldegonde had intrusted this matter to the Admiral, knowing that for bravery and reckless daring that old "beggar of the sea" could hardly meet his match.

But with the death of Orange private grudges and animosities sprang up, and Treslong became restive and defiant. He was jealous of Sainte Aldegonde, and he was a bitter enemy of the French policy which was strenuously advocated by the latter. He was in no sort of haste to do his bidding—first demanding a certain sort of boat for the expedition; and then, when these were supplied him,

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delaying and frittering away precious time, until at the last he so exasperated his countrymen that they rose up and threw him into prison.

These things took time to accomplish. But whilst bickerings and recriminations were being bandied about between the nobles, Antwerp was waiting for supplies, and Parma was working slowly and steadily towards his appointed end; and the citizens looked each other in the face as days passed by, and asked when the supplies were coming which should put the city beyond fear of famine.

Still in these days of July the peril was not imminent; it was believed that Admiral Treslong and his *kromstevens*, laden with golden grain and supplies of all kinds, might any time be seen sailing into the city. The loss of Liefkenshoek, the death of the Prince, and Mondragon's threatened attack upon Lillo, absorbed the attention of the citizens; and for the moment it was hoped that the very imminence of the peril engendered by their great loss would draw the States closer together and inflame them with unselfish and patriotic zeal.

The messenger who had ridden the sixty miles from Delft to Antwerp in one night, to bring the dread tidings of the Prince's death to that city, was lodging now in the hospitable house in Hooch Straet, whither he had been brought by Lionel after his tale had been told to the crowd in the street, and reported again before the Council.

The young man was a courtier in the household of William of Orange, and had been standing near his master when the fatal blow had been struck.

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The assassin had been the bearer of important tidings relative to the death of the Duke of Anjou, and had been hanging about the house for above a day. He had had an interview with the Prince; but this had been altogether unexpected, and he had not been armed. He had been so shabbily attired that the Prince had sent orders for him to have clothing supplied him at his own cost; and Gerard was wearing these very clothes when he struck down his benefactor, firing three bullets into his body as he was leading the way from the dining-room up the staircase after he and his guests had dined.

The horror of that scene was indelibly impressed upon the mind of the young man, and impressed itself vividly upon the minds of his hearers: the exclamation of the dying man; the prayer for his country—always the first thought with him; his death in a few minutes—commending his soul by an almost wordless gesture into the hands of his Saviour. There was not a dry eye in that long room as the messenger in broken accents told his tale; and the story of his long ride through the country from three o'clock upon the fatal day till he arrived in Antwerp at five the following morning, having changed horses many times along the route, was listened to with breathless interest. The universal grief and wailing he everywhere left behind him; the tolling of the bells, which for days seemed to ring in his ears; the sight of the blanched faces which had surrounded him at every halt—all these things were indelibly engraven on his memory; and as he spoke of them, his listeners felt as though they saw with his

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eyes and heard with his ears, and would never, never forget that terrible tenth of July so long as time remained.

"If we have lost our greatest leader, may we not make one great sacrifice to his memory?" spoke Lionel Wilford on the next occasion when the Broad Council met. "It is but a short while since he sent us the message of earnest import, imploring us to cut the Kowenstyn Dike. He is no longer here to urge his will upon us; but may it not be the greatest tribute we can pay to his memory to do the thing he desired of us, so that if his spirit can know what passes here below, he may have the satisfaction of knowing that for Antwerp, at least, his death has done more than his life?"

There was a visible impression produced by these words upon the assembly. A murmur almost like that of assent began to arise. Perhaps had the Burgomaster arisen and made one of his burning and eloquent orations, the day might yet have been carried. But Sainte Aldegonde had been half convinced by arguments used before of the danger to the city from so heroic a remedy against possible famine, and he remained silent; whilst another counsellor arose and asked why, if a dike must be pierced, the Saftingen Dike upon the Flemish bank would not answer the same purpose, for there the land was far less rich and valuable, and yet the mass of water would equally be brought up to the walls of Antwerp.

This suggestion was hailed as an inspiration by many at the Council, who desired to appear to wish to work the will of the Prince, whilst by no means desirous of foregoing

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their private interests. The Burgomaster, however, made doubtful answer. He said that when he himself had proposed that plan to the Prince, the latter had pointed out many serious objections; and it was certainly open to the objection that the Prince of Parma's camp was on the Flemish side of the river, and that this camp and all its adjacent forts would neutralize to a great extent the value of the rupture. So in the end nothing came of Lionel's move but a vast amount of talk, which ended, as was only too common, in recrimination and disputings, whilst the whole question of dike-piercing went again into abeyance, until the hour was past.

"It is useless to strive more," said Lionel, on his return home; "the people are resolved to blind their eyes. They will see nothing but that which they wish to see. I spoke my word. I did what I could. But our Burgomaster is himself discouraged and half-hearted in the matter. And neither he nor any person in Antwerp yet believes that Parma's bridge can ever be built."

"Gianibelli says it can," remarked Malcolm, looking up. "He says it can, and that he could do it."

"He is a fond dreamer," remarked Maud, with a little laugh. "Methinks he believes he could overturn the world, if great men would but listen to his wild schemes."

"Not always so wild as thou thinkest, my sister," answered Malcolm, with a smile. "I have not learning enough to understand all his talk—nay, nor more than a tithe of it—but there be times when his words strike home like a ray of light, and I see in a moment things I

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had not dreamed of before. He is a wonderful man, and he knows more of those arts of mining and construction than any soul I have ever seen, or any one in Antwerp, I take it."

"And he is Veronica's father," whispered Maud, with a mischievous smile in her eyes, as she bent over her brother; "and so he must needs find a champion in thee."

A bright colour arose in the young man's cheek; but he made no response in words, only flashing at her a glance of warning—for at present this love of his was kept a secret in his own breast, only revealed to his sister because she was very near and dear to him.

"He is a clever man," said Lionel, "a man of learning and genius; and yet I mislike him. He has the air of a mocker against man and God. Still, he knows what he says, and if he thinks our wide and turbulent river may be bound by a bridge—as it was plain the great Prince likewise did—it behoves us the more to think carefully what we do, lest we be overtaken in the snare that is set for us."

"But," said Malcolm, with a bright, eager light in his eyes, "he says, too, that if the Prince of Parma builds the bridge, he can destroy it by one single gigantic blow, such as shall make the ears of all Europe tingle. And in all faith I trow he could do that which he says. Methinks it is no idle boast. I verily believe the thing could be done. He has almost shown me how."

The girls pressed round him with eager curiosity.

"Nay, Malcolm, but how? Tell us!" they cried, with bated breath. "Is it by some witchcraft and sorcery?"

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"Nay, nay," answered the youth, smiling. "Do ye not know that all such talk is idle folly—the folly of men who know not what they say? Our Italian friend deals not in sorcery—if there be such a thing in the world, which our parents bid us doubt. He only uses those things we all of us use day by day and hour by hour, little knowing what power in them lies. He knows their properties. He has a mine of lore, which helps him to constant new discoveries, and each discovery is what he calls a step towards the goal. But I must not divulge to you what he has told me. He pledged me to silence, and my word must not be broken. All I may say I have said—that if the bridge were to be built, he could shatter it at a blow; he says it himself, and I believe that it is true."

"Heaven send it may be so!" said juffrouw Van der Hammer, with a slight shudder; "for it is a fearful thing to be cut off from all one's friends, and shut within a city fenced about with foes. We who have been through it once know what it is like."

"Ah, but it will never be like that again, grandam," cried Philip eagerly. "Why, everybody says the French king will shortly send a great army and drive the Prince of Parma out of the country. Now that the Prince of Orange is dead, they say that he will be King not only of our lower Provinces, but of Holland and Zeeland as well—which was the only thing that made the difficulty before with the envoys. Don't you know, as long as our Prince lived, Holland and Zeeland would never have obeyed any-

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body but him? and the proud French were in a manner jealous of his influence. But now that their King may have undisputed sovereignty, he will no longer hesitate, and we shall soon see the Spaniards swept from the land, and enjoy our ancient rights and privileges under the protection of our brothers of France!"

Philip was repeating the talk that was common in the city, and popular amongst its citizens, who were not over and above well informed as to the nature of the negotiation on foot, and were absolutely ignorant of the profound and complicated game of dissimulation and intrigue being played by the various parties at the French Court, and by the Spanish potentate himself. The confidence felt throughout the lower Provinces that France would speedily come to their rescue, was doing more to paralyze their own efforts after freedom than any disunion amongst themselves could do; and it seemed to many that the death of the Prince of Orange would tend to facilitate the negotiation, by inducing Holland and Zeeland to throw themselves as unreservedly into the arms of the French as Brabant and Flanders were prepared to do, who had partially submitted themselves again to Spain, but hoped that France would come forward and drive out the hated foe from their midst.

The elder members of the Wilford family, however, did not share the confidence of their townsfolk; though they kept their misgivings for the most part to themselves, as, if they spoke of them openly, it was regarded as a sign of treachery and their foreign lukewarmness in the cause.

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Lukewarmness was in reality sapping away the strength of Antwerp, as the abandonment of Hérenthals plainly showed. It was another of those extraordinary blunders that were a marked feature all through this momentous siege. Hérenthals might not appear very valuable to Antwerp, but it was of immense value to the Spaniards, who at once took possession of it.

"It is plain the Prince of Orange is dead," was the remark of their leader as he walked in unopposed, and Antwerp awoke, as usual when it was too late, to see the folly of her apathy.

As the days and weeks sped by, and there was no news of Admiral Treslong, save that he was still mutinous and refractory, and had been openly censured by the States-General (with the effect only of increasing his defiance and insubordination), the garrison and citizens alike became anxious about the question of supply, and prices began to rise with alarming rapidity.

As soon as this was known, there were plenty of bold Zeeland skippers to be found ready to run cargoes of corn and other provisions into Antwerp (though Parma's vigilance along the left bank of the river rendered the task both difficult and dangerous), in order to obtain double or treble the price for their wares that they could get elsewhere.

But it was hazardous traffic, as many of them found to their cost; and had they not been hardy and almost amphibious creatures, and perhaps the most experienced sailors in the world for that species of water traffic, the

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task would have been even more difficult and hazardous than it was.

But the Spaniards were almost as eager after food as the citizens of Antwerp. Cleverly as they tried to conceal the fact, supplies with them were terribly low. Their master, who expected so much from his soldiers, kept them villanously ill-paid and ill-fed; and these tempting loads of eatables passing into the city were a mark for the Spanish soldiers that they keenly prized. Antwerp was soon to know what deadly peril their brave allies ran who were bringing them food in the teeth of Spanish hunger and Spanish guns.

"The boats are coming! the boats are coming!" Such was the cry passed up the streets one brilliant August morning. It was a welcome cry to housewives and prudent citizens, for they were all beginning to make private preparations against the possible scarcity with which they were threatened; and at the news of any boats bearing up with the tide to the city walls, hundreds of persons would crowd down to the Hoy Kay, where the usual landings were made, and try to fill their baskets with such provisions as were to be had. Some boat-loads were bought intact by the city authorities; but there were certain skippers who traded direct with the citizens, and as it was usual for a number of boat-loads to come in together—generally on a high tide, which had helped them to pass quickly beneath the Spanish guns, and to avoid their boats in the chase—large numbers of persons flocked down to the quay, all eager to see what quality of goods

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was arriving, and what share they themselves could obtain.

Roosje was always foremost, if possible, at the arrival of the boat. She was the practical manager of that large double household, which comprised so many members, old people and tender children, as well as the young and strong, and it was natural that she should feel anxious to fill her store-places with all such food as would keep through the winter months, when provisions might be scarce and yet more dear. She had begun a private victualling of her own before the city generally commenced to trouble about it, and was almost always foremost on the quay to see the boats come in, her sisters or brothers often accompanying her to help in the bargains and in the carrying up of the loads purchased.

Sometimes her husband was with her, questioning the skippers about the doings of the enemy along the dikes, and the increase or decrease of their numbers. The fall of Liefkenshoek to the Spaniards had seriously impaired the food traffic into the city. Formerly there had been little peril to encounter before the boats reached Kalloo, where Parma's bridge preparations were being commenced. Now they were openly fired on from the fort so ingloriously lost; and though Lillo did its best to shield and protect them, several cargoes of grain had been sunk there as it was, whilst others had fallen into the hands of the Spaniards, and the unfortunate Zeelanders had been butchered in cold blood.

News of the fate of the first convoy sent after the fall

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of Liefkenshoek (before the Zeelanders had realized that they had enemies there instead of friends) had reached the city from Lillo a day or two before, and therefore the arrival of these boats was hailed with the greater satisfaction. People had for a few days been really afraid that supplies might already begin to fail them, and therefore at the first appearance of this little flotilla there was a general rush down to the Hoy Kay.

The boats were still some little way off by the time Roosje, together with Coosje, Malcolm, and Maurice, arrived at the water's side, and there was quite a concourse gathered there in expectation of their arrival.

There was a little haze hanging over the river, and the outline of the vessels was not very clearly seen; but the slowness with which they approached excited wonder and curiosity amongst the impatient waiters.

"They are not wont to come thus!"—"There is not wind to swell the sails!"—"No; but why do they not take to their oars, as they are wont to do?"—"What has come to them, that they are content thus to drift?"—"Heaven send this be not another misfortune pending!"—"By the Holy Virgin," cried a woman of the Roman Catholic faith, crossing herself devoutly, "I fear me they are phantom ships sent hither by the devil to delude us!"

And then a silence fell upon all the waiting crowd, as though each feared to hazard an opinion as to what this strange sight might mean.

Nearer and nearer drifted the boats with the rising tide, and a strange sound of moaning was heard from the

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foremost. Unable to bear the suspense any longer, Malcolm flung off his shoes and his upper tunic and plunged into the river, followed by a cheer from the crowd. He struck out boldly, and quickly reached the foremost boat, into which he adroitly scrambled. For a moment he disappeared from view, stooping down as though to look at something lying in the bottom of the little craft, and then he suddenly seized a great paddle, and rapidly propelled the boat towards the quay.

"A curse upon the Spaniards!" was the one word he uttered through his shut teeth as he drove the vessel up against the stone wall; and as it was held fast by a hundred willing hands, many others sprang aboard, and soon there arose the sound of bitter curses and execrations as the nature of the cargo became known.

No grain was there, no butter nor cheese, nor any of those commodities which the women were waiting to receive, but some half-dozen cruelly-mutilated men and women—yes, women also; for strange as it may seem, the bold Zeeland wives often accompanied their husbands on this perilous mission—some already dead, others living yet, but slowly bleeding to death, mangled past the hope of recovery, so that the truest kindness would have been to put them out of their misery at once, as though they had been dumb beasts.

Yes, it was this species of savage warfare that made the Spanish name so justly execrated in the Netherlands. Not content with capturing the cargoes of corn, not even content with butchering the brave Zeelanders who had

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striven to run these cargoes into the half-beleaguered city, the Spanish soldiers had amused themselves and sought to strike new terror into the hearts both of Zeelanders and Antwerpers by this piece of brutal and gratuitous cruelty. Every boat as it came ashore in the city out of the circling mist bore its ghastly burden of dead and dying human creatures, upon whom these ghastly and fearful injuries had been inflicted.

No wonder the heart of the multitude was stirred; no wonder the curses and execrations which arose from the river-side were deep and loud, like the roaring of the waves of the sea.

The women with one accord threw down their baskets, and vied with each other in dressing the fearful gashes and bleeding wounds, and holding the cup of water to the parched lips of the dying sufferer—doing all, in fact, that could be done to allay their pain and make easy the passage to the death they coveted. Scarce six out of the whole number ever lived to recover of their hurts, and deep and wide-spread was the indignation of the city as this new instance of Spanish ferocity was brought home to them.

"Better sink with our city into the waves of the sea than own such hell-hounds as our masters," was the word that was freely passed from mouth to mouth. "Sure they must see that *anything* is better than the tender mercies of Spain. Sure they will do anything to keep the hated foe at bay."

So said the women in Hooch Straet, as they watched

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over the one sufferer brought to their house, who lingered on until evening and then died. It had been for them a terrible day, bringing home to the minds of the girls the possibility of horrors of which they had formerly whispered without in any way realizing how fearful they might become in reality. The face of Coosje, usually so full of animation and light, was white to the lips with the horror of what she had that day witnessed; whilst Roosje could not keep herself from going again and again to fold her own children in her arms with passionate embraces, remembering stories told of the Antwerp Spanish Fury ten years before, when little children had been dismembered alive before their mothers' eyes, or tossed on the sword's point out of lofty windows, or into the advancing flames of the burning houses.

"Mother, ought we to let them stay in the city? Why do we not all fly together whilst there is yet time?" she asked once, in passionate tones, as she clasped her youngest little girl in her arms. "Is it right to run such fearful risks for these innocent little ones? We keep saying that Antwerp will never fall—that the French will come—that the Prince of Parma will never succeed with his blockade; but who can really forecast the future? Lionel does not believe in the French alliance. The Prince of Orange believed that the bridge might be built. Why do we all stay here, perhaps to perish? Why not fly while we may?"

"Courage, my daughter," said Madam Wilford, with a smile, whilst the young wife's own mother looked at her

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with tender sympathy and encouragement. "There be many things to think of ere a great household like ours may be broken up. The jonkhers have their duties here. It would be an ill thing to take them away in the moment of peril; and I trow well that thy husband and my son would not budge an inch from his duty within these walls. If we go, we must leave our nearest and dearest behind us. Would that please you, daughter? And again, whither shall we go? True, we are some of us thinking of a return to England, where there is for the present peace for all who think as we do; but our plans are not yet so forward that we could quit this city without great loss; and I for one would sooner face a peril all together than see our happy party split up, some going one way and some another—wife parted from husband and child from parent. Peril and privation shared together can be sweet, as we do know. Far, far more terrible is the uncertainty of living from day to day in doubt of the safety of those we love best."

"Yes, yes, I know it," answered Roosje, with a little sigh; "we have talked it all over a hundred times, and have always resolved to stay and brave out all these perils together. I could not bear to be parted from Lionel, and I know well that he would not leave his post—belike it would be wrong for him to dream of it at such a time of danger. But my children, my little ones! When I think of what I saw to-day—"

"Hush, daughter!" said Madam Wilford, half sternly, half tenderly: "I would not have thee even think in such

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a fashion. God is our refuge and strength, and He will give us strength for what lies before us. The future is His. With Him lies the fate of ourselves and of our country. Let that be enough for us. Let us go on from day to day, not forecasting the future, but bravely facing the present. So alone can such times as these be lived through; so alone must we try to live through them."

"Thou art right, my mother. We will have faith," answered Roosje, with a great effort after calmness; and kissing her mother-in-law tenderly, she led her little ones away to put them to bed, the fierce storm in her heart for the time being quieted.

Yet every day as it passed brought its modicum of excitement. Sometimes it was grain-boats really coming in (for the traffic still continued, though the prices rose with the peril), and bringing with them news of the world without, and the progress of the Prince of Parma's preparations for bridging the mighty river. Sometimes it was news from Lillo, brought by Joris or Otto, who from their great familiarity with the river and the city were not unfrequently sent with despatches from Teligny to the Burgomaster, telling of the preparations of the Spaniards for a grand assault of the fortress, and of the courage and resolution of the garrison to repel it. The Van der Hammer brothers declared the place absolutely impregnable, and said that Mondragon and Mansfield and Parma himself might all coalesce together for its reduction without making any impression. And that news was welcome

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enough to those in the city; for if Lillo were to fall their case would be bad indeed.

Lionel, coming home from a walk about the city with a friend, who had visited with him one of the few churches where the Roman Catholic rites were permitted to be performed (for his friend was a Romanist, like many in Antwerp still), was aware of a great tumult going on in the neighbourhood of his house, shouting, and crying, and threatening voices all raised together; and hurrying after the scurrying and howling mob, he heard the words yelled in every possible accent of rage and hatred,—

"Spanish spies! Spanish spies! Take them alive! Serve them as they have served others!"—"Ay, ay; they shall taste what they have made others taste!"—"Hack them in pieces!"—"Roast them alive!"—"Pull them in pieces with horses!"—every savage suggestion being greeted with a howl of approval from the maddened crowd; and Lionel, suddenly drawing his sword and setting his teeth hard, plunged through the throng, which made way for him by instinct, and soon found himself in the forefront of the commotion.

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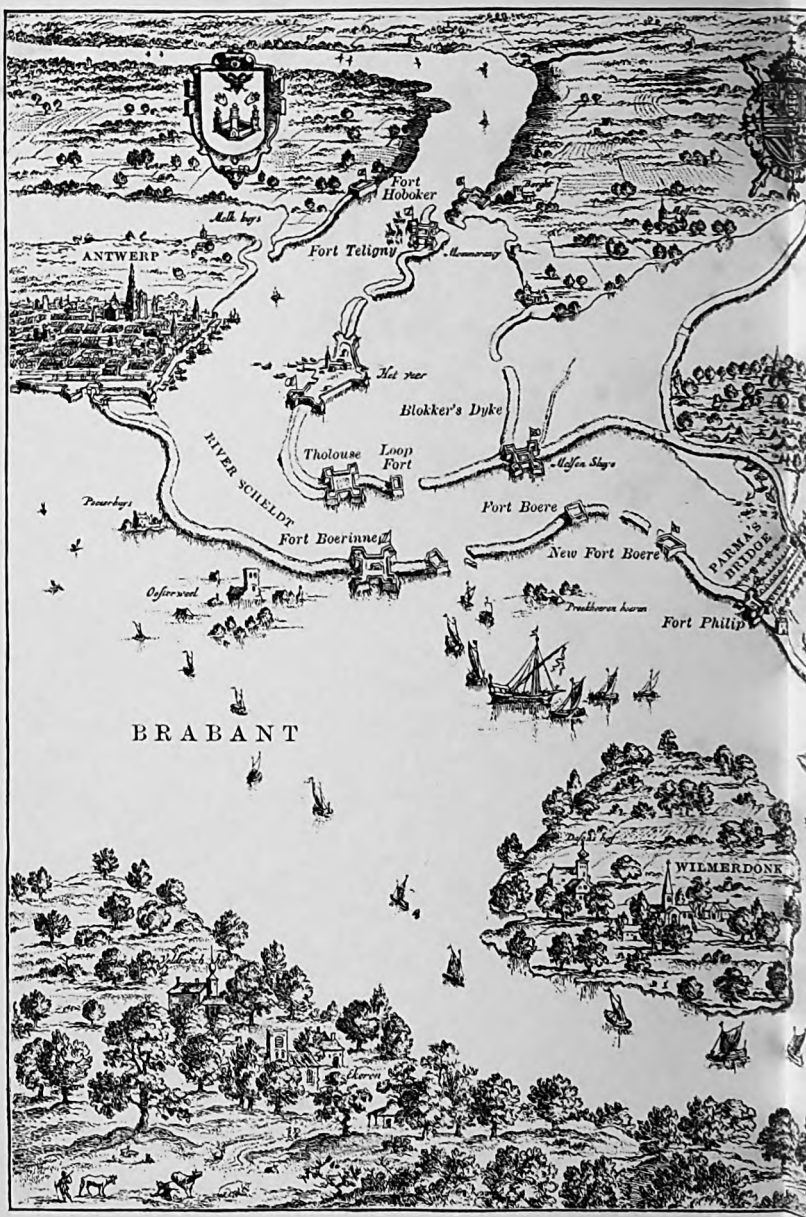

PLAN OF THE SIEGE
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GE OF ANTWERP.
Dutch Print.)

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CHAPTER V.

IN PARMA'S CAMP.

"VICTORY! victory! The doom of Antwerp is sealed!"

Two tall and stately youths, leaning over the battlements of Fort St. Mary, and engrossed in conversation together, turned quickly round at the sound of these triumphant words, and found themselves face to face with one of their own brothers-in-arms, who was waving his sword above his head with a gesture of impetuous exultation.

"Nay, now, Diego; what meanest thou?" they asked, almost in a breath. "Has the death of the Prince of Orange brought the rebels to their senses? Methought it had but hardened their hearts in their impious rebellion."

"Ay, verily, so it has—dogs of heretics that they are!" quoth the first speaker, a swarthy, muscular young Spaniard of some five-and-twenty summers, with fierce, flashing eyes, jet-black hair, and handsome, haughty features of a pronounced aquiline type. "But the devil, their master, is leading them a fine dance! They are listening to his counsels with greedy ears, and shutting their eyes fast to the net into which they are being drawn.

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The holy saints and the Blessed Virgin are fighting for us. They are like sheep led to the slaughter. Bah! how can those low-bred burghers think for a moment to defy the picked veterans of Spain, and led by such a general as our Alexander? *Madre de Dios!* their mad folly is only less than their wickedness."

"Nay, but tell us what has chanced?" asked eagerly the taller of the two companions who had been thus interrupted in their talk. His face was more attractive than that of the man he had addressed as Diego. It was something of the same type, and was thoroughly Spanish in colouring and general aspect; but the features were more regular and more finely cut, and the reckless hardihood—almost ferocity—of Diego's countenance was not reflected in that of his friend Rodrigo de Castro. He looked every inch a soldier, but there was nothing brutal in his aspect. It was easy to picture the one engaged in scenes of outrage and carnage, loot and plunder; the other one would rather picture in the battle-field alone, and would not easily connect him with scenes of brutal recrimination.

Still less would the observer suspect his brother and companion of the like fierce passions. Alphonso de Castro had the face rather of the dreamer and thinker than of the soldier, albeit the steadfast look of the eyes and the firm set of the lips betokened a high courage and iron resolution. Brought up, as were all noble Spanish youths, to the profession of arms, and devoted, like all those who served beneath him, to their great general, the Prince

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of Parma, it had never occurred to Alphonso to be anything but a soldier. At the same time, he had contrived to retain much of his gentleness and refinement of mind in his warlike profession; and even in the camp his spare moments were often spent in poring over some small volume carried in his pocket, or in metaphysical or theological discussion with some companion of a like thoughtful turn. He had the same delicately-chiselled features as his brother, but in colouring he was much fairer. His eyes were a pencilled gray, that looked black in moments of excitement, but that could be wonderfully soft and expressive at other times, and were usually tranquil and thoughtful in expression. His skin had none of the dark swarthiness which was so common in the Spanish soldier, exposed as he was to all the inclemencies of the weather, but was wonderfully smooth and fair, slightly olive in tint, but with a quick fluctuating colour which sometimes gave rise amongst his companions to the nickname of the "muchacha" (the girl). In figure he was slight, but tall and wiry, very agile at all feats requiring quickness and dexterity, and an excellent swordsman, though lacking in the weight which gave the advantage in the field to some of his companions. Diego de Escolano would have made almost two of him; but for all that Alphonso was a very excellent soldier, and had the gift of inspiring in the little band of soldiers whom he habitually headed in action an unbounded enthusiasm and devotion, which made them ready for any service to which he might lead them.

Both brothers had their whole heart and soul in the

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crusade (as it seemed to them) in which they were embarked on behalf of King and Church, and they eagerly desired Diego to explain his words; for if Antwerp fell into their hands once again, they fully believed, with the rest of the world, that the whole country, including Holland and Zeeland, would submit itself anew to the Spanish monarch.

"Antwerp is as good as ours!" cried Diego once again, raising his sword and flourishing it over his head. "What think ye of this, brothers in arms?—the great Kowenstyn Dike is ours!"

"*Pardiez!* Sayest thou so?" cried Rodrigo, wheeling round to look towards the great bulwark in question. "The Kowenstyn ours—and without fighting, too! How comes that, good Diego, and how knowest thou it?"

"I know it for that I was in attendance on the Prince but two short hours ago, when the Lord of Kowenstyn came to him, and offered for a price to place the whole of the dike in his hands."

"*Justo cielo!* how the Saints fight for the righteous cause!" cried Rodrigo eagerly. "Come now, good Diego; tell us more. Wert thou present at the conference? Methought the grim Sieur of Kowenstyn was our deadly foe. How has it come about that he has become our friend all in a moment?"

"That I can also explain in a few words," replied the Spaniard; "for, as you well know, our Prince has a wonderful fashion of drawing out the confidence of all who come to him. Seeing that this grim old lord was about to proffer friendship, our Alexander met him with every

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courtesy, and at once granted him a private audience, only some two or three of his gentlemen, of whom I was one, being admitted to the interview. When they commenced to talk it was plain enough that the Prince had been striving to open negotiations with the lord of the dike, and that his overtures had not been without effect. But the mischief for Antwerp was, as one might well guess, done by themselves; for a month ago the Sieur of Kowenstyn was on the side of the rebellious heretics."

"And what has passed to change him?"

"Why, plainly the change in him has been wrought by their own blind folly. And the death of the Prince of Orange has finished the work their obstinate blindness began. The great William had the sense to see that if the dike were pierced there would be no siege of Antwerp; and he sent urgent messages to the people to take this step. The Sieur of Kowenstyn, who had received letters himself from the Prince, went in person to the city to urge upon the greasy burghers the step their Stadtholder had proposed, but they would not listen either to the one or the other. They thought they knew better than either Prince or Lord, and it is plain they insulted the grim old man who holds the key of the Kowenstyn, and that he has been brooding over his wrongs ever since. The news of the death of the one man in whom he trusted, and the letters of our own general here, have done the rest. Disgusted with the citizens of Antwerp, despairing of the cause now that the head is gone, he has wisely resolved to submit to his rightful sovereign. The Kowenstyn is ours.

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Before many weeks have passed it will bristle with forts from end to end. No cutting it through now, to bring the sea to the walls of Antwerp, and destroy the labours of our hands. The great dike is ours, and we can commence the building of the bridge as soon as we please now; for our work can no longer be rendered abortive by an act on the part of the city. Their day has gone by now; our turn is come!"

The eyes of the young men brightened. Their enthusiasm for their great general was unbounded. Alexander Farnese, Prince of Parma, had won, as he deserved to win, the enthusiastic love of his soldiers, and any undertaking planned by him was always cheerfully and actively carried out by those beneath him. A valiant soldier, always in the forefront of the battle, a man of learning and genius and indomitable resolution such as could not fail to inspire respect, thoughtful and even tender over his hard-worked and ill-paid servants, he kept his soldiers together when under another general they would have deserted by hundreds and thousands. And in times when savage ferocity was the order of the day, and excited neither reprobation nor horror, he was studiously humane and gentle in his dealings even with his foes, and never disgraced his laurels by those scenes of atrocity which shed such a ghastly light over the reign of his predecessor Alva. He had done more in his short rule towards conciliating the Netherlands than all his predecessors put together. Much of the fatal submission of opulent cities was traceable to the politic and moderate spirit of Farnese. His name excited no shudder

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in the breasts of the inhabitants, and his propositions were always couched in conciliatory and even generous terms. True, he never gave way one iota upon the point at issue. Civil and religious liberty was never yielded by him; he would have thought himself a traitor to his King and his God had he dreamed of such concession. But he contrived to make the reality of slavery wear such a gentle garb, and he made such lenient-sounding terms for the rebellious who would not submit—leaving them time to retire with their goods from the submissive cities, instead of putting them to the sword or throwing them into prison—that his terms had been accepted again and again; and it was for the future to show the fatal error into which the country had fallen, that quietly submitted to the exile of its best and wealthiest citizens, and the consequent deflection to other and freer places of the trade which had made the greatness and prosperity of the land.

Holland and Zeeland (if the death of their Prince did not drive them to despair) might still be a hard nut to crack, but upon the salvation or capture of Antwerp hung, as it were, the fate of the whole of the lower Netherlands; and Parma was determined that the cause should not be lost by any lack of zeal and exercise of ingenuity on his part. His whole soul was in the task. His loyalty to his King and to the cause of religion was bound up in the struggle; his patriotism and his conscience were at one; and those who followed him were infected by his spirit of devotion. These ignorant traders, who were setting themselves up to contemn the religion of the

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whole civilized world, and professed themselves wiser and better than the Church, seemed to the Spaniards (reared in orthodox bigotry) to be little better than fiends incarnate, doing the work of their master the devil in striving to overthrow the divine government of Christ's Church. The mad fury of the Iconoclasts, the insane blasphemy of certain ignorant men who would spit upon and trample under foot the consecrated bread, in the belief that they were trampling upon idolatry, not unnaturally gave colour to innumerable false and exaggerated ideas about the reformed tenets. There is no cause, however pure, that is not sullied by the folly and the blindness of its ignorant advocates; and nowhere was this better exemplified than in the struggle for religious liberty in the sixteenth century. To the devout if bigoted Spaniard, brought up in a blind and absolute faith in the sanctity of his Church and the truth of all its teachings, this independence of thought was like nothing but the work of the devil, striving to subvert the doctrines of God. To put down by every means the spread of this disease was not only politic, but an actual religious duty. The soldier bent on loot and rapine believed he was doing God direct service by every act of violence he performed. He was just as much in earnest on his side as the persecuted Calvinist or Lutheran on his. Each was absolutely convinced of the righteousness of his cause, and so fought with the desperate valour that comes to those who believe that Heaven fights with and for them.

But the personal popularity of Alexander of Parma

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went a long way with his own troops. As they stood talking together, these noble Spanish youths betrayed by every word they spoke, every opinion they uttered, how full of enthusiasm they were for their general.

As they thus stood talking they were joined by another comrade, Carlos de Cueva; a very Saul amongst them, for he stood a head taller than the tallest, and was magnificently accoutred, being, in fact, a scion of one of the noblest houses of Spain. Between him and the De Castro brothers a very close and warm friendship existed; and from the fact that Diego had grown up from boyhood with the two latter, he was admitted to the rank of a comrade of theirs, albeit not altogether congenial in disposition or character. These young officers each had a band of soldiers over whom they exercised control and oversight. Carlos, indeed, had furnished his band, and paid them out of his own almost boundless resources, and he had many times made advances to his general from his own well-filled coffers. He, too, had been present at the conference with the Sieur of Kowenstyn, and his face was smiling as he came towards his friends.

"Has Diego been beforehand with the news?" he asked as he drew near. "Methinks the fate of Antwerp is surely sealed now. That our Alexander can build his bridge, if he has the mind to, I have never doubted. Our reluctance to begin the actual toil has been the fear that so soon as it had become evident that the work would be seriously undertaken, the dike would be cut through, and the whole plan rendered abortive. Now that we have command of

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the Kowenstyn, the good citizens of Antwerp may gibe and jeer or wring their hands in despair, according as it takes them. At least they cannot roll the salt waves of the ocean up to the walls of Antwerp. Messengers have already gone forth to Mondragon and Mansfield. Marquis Richebourg is with the General, speaking of matters concerning the bridge. Grass will no longer grow under our feet. If we are to build, let it be done before the winter storms and ice-floes come down to stop us. We are no longer in sunny Spain. We must remember the severities of this cold northern winter, and act accordingly."

"Hurrah for the bridge and for Parma!" cried Diego, in an access of wild delight, as he brandished his sword in the direction of the distant city. "Hurrah for the day of vengeance, when another Spanish Fury shall be poured out upon Antwerp, when our swords shall be dyed red with the blood of women and children, and our coffers filled with the gold of—"

"Peace, Diego!" cried Alphonso, with sudden energy, his eyes dilating as he spoke. "A truce to such coward words and thoughts. Dost thou wage war with women and children? Is thy sword dedicated to no nobler use than the murder of unresisting babes? Shame upon thee for such words!"

Diego had turned very red, and now advanced upon Alphonso with threatening mien, his sword shining in his hand.

"No one ever called me coward who did not take back the word at the sword's point, Alphonso de Castro," he cried, a red light leaping into his eyes as he spoke.

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But Alphonso never moved, save to throw back his head a little more; and gazing full into the eyes of his passionate comrade, he replied fearlessly,—

"I will not take it back, not even at the sword's point, till thou hast taken back thine own evil words, Diego. Are we men, or are we brute beasts? Do we wage war with men, or do we prefer to wreak a coward vengeance upon those who never held a sword, and are as sheep in the shambles? Think, good Diego, what thy words mean, and thou wilt surely take them back of thine own accord."

"Heretic spawn! it were a righteous act to slay them! Are we not bidden to strike at all alike, root and branch?" grumbled Diego sulkily, not desirous of quarrelling with his companions, and yet by no means of the same way of thinking as Alphonso, who generally won the other two over to his side of an argument. "As though I should ever do a deed unworthy of my name or calling!"

"Boast not too soon of that, Diego," said Carlos, rather curtly. "It seems as though there were plenty of the savage in thee yet. Alphonso is right. Let the usages of war be never so fierce, it is a coward act for men to redden their blades on the bodies of hapless women and children. Methinks there has been something too much of this same coward-cruelty in the Spanish ranks. But our great general will not give his captured cities over to butchery, as the Duke of Alva was pleased to do. Wherefore, my good fellow, spend thy strength in fighting with men, for I doubt me much if thy sword will be required for the congenial and soldier-like task of butchering women, for

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the which thou seemest to crave." There was something so quietly contemptuous in the tone of the rebuke, that Diego turned away and marched off, muttering oaths under his breath; for he did not wish to quarrel with the young Count of Cueva, and he felt that he might, if he remained, speak words which would inevitably lead to a quarrel, perhaps at the sword's point.

"That fellow should have been with Alva," remarked Carlos, as the heavy figure disappeared down the battlements; "he is just such a tool as the Duke would have loved to use. Our Prince covets not such bloodthirsty followers. And there will be no second 'Spanish Fury' permitted when Antwerp falls into our hands."

"I trow not," answered Rodrigo. "Our Alexander knows how much better it is to conciliate than to exasperate the people of the land, and has proved his point in a hundred different ways. Thou thinkest Antwerp will surely fall, Carlos? Yet it will be a tough nut to crack."

"*Capita!* None too hard for our Alexander; of that I am very sure. I wonder what the citizens are feeling, if the news has yet reached them. To think that they might have been masters of the dike themselves, and to let it all pass into the hands of the beleaguering foe! Methinks the great Sainte Aldegonde must sure be sleeping. Time was when he would scarce have committed such folly."

"I marvel that they be so blind; but they say the city is very turbulent, and that it is ruled by fat, greasy burghers, who know naught of warfare."

"The burghers have shown themselves excellent good

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soldiers many times," remarked Alphonso, smiling thoughtfully as he looked out towards the city, the spires of which they could just see gleaming in the evening light. "I would I knew what was passing within those walls. I would I could hear what the men there were saying one to another. I would fain take a skiff and drift up with the tide to the quays there, and wander about the city to hear what the people said one to another. I can understand their tongue with ease now. It would just please my fantasy to listen to the talk they hold with each other, and hear all that is spoken about us and this bridge, and whether they know what they have suffered in the loss of the great dike."

Carlos smiled at the notion, but it caught his fancy too. Just now there was but little stir in Parma's camp. Mondragon was threatening Lillo, but no open attack had yet been made. The triumph at Liefkenshoek had put the whole army into a jubilant frame of mind, and this fresh piece of news seemed to promise easy victory to their arms.

"A Spaniard in Antwerp, boy! How long dost thou think thou couldst prowl those streets without being run through the body by fifty swords? How much dost thou think thou couldst hear of the burgher talk? Dost think they take every foreigner into their counsels, or would shout their opinions from the house-tops?"

"Nay, verily; I am not a child," answered Alphonso, smiling. "Nor would I run into bootless peril. If I went at all, I would go well disguised."

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"Disguised! how disguised?"

"That is easily said. I would make a raid upon a grain-boat going up the river to the city, and would get it into mine own hands. Then I would send its own crew back whence they came, but keep their outer garments; and dressing myself like a Zeeland skipper, I would bring my boat into the city at dusk, and wander about there at will, till I had satisfied my curiosity, and had seen what manner of place Antwerp is. We could take one of our Dutch soldiers to do the chaffering and bartering at the quay-side whilst we wandered through the city—whilst I did, I mean; for I know not if any other shares my curiosity, or would care to adventure himself within the hostile walls."

"If thou goest, I go too," said Rodrigo quickly. "But I know not if thou art serious in what thou sayest. Wherefore shouldst thou adventure thyself thus? Yet the thought is something attractive. How came it into thine head?"

"I scarce know," answered Alphonso, smiling thoughtfully. "Methinks some such schemes are always ready to present themselves to us sons of Spain when there be no fighting on hand to employ our energies."

"There be some truth in that," answered Carlos, smiling. "To be doing and daring is the very life of the Spanish soldier. I verily believe I will go with thee.—Rodrigo, is it a mad enterprise, or no? Thou hast the steadiest head of the three of us."

"I will answer that question anon, when I have better

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considered it," answered the elder De Castro as he turned away to descend the stairs. "At present duty calls me to my men below. I will think more of it when I have more leisure."

Carlos, thus left alone with Alphonso upon the battlements of the fort, looked smilingly into the face of the young man, and said,—

"What is in thy mind, *amigo mio?* There is somewhat behind all this; think not to hide it from me."

Alphonso regarded his friend with a meditative smile.

"Thou hast a marvellous gift of reading my thoughts, Carlos; and yet I scarce know how to put them into words. I frankly own I am often assailed by a great curiosity; yet I sometimes wonder whether such curiosity may not be sin."

"Sin? How so? What is this curiosity of which thou speakest?"

"Truly neither more nor less than to understand what manner of temptation it can be which blinds men's eyes to the truth, and leads them to dare everything and suffer everything for some hideous fantasy dangled before their eyes by the father of lies himself. As I take my watch here at nights, and think of all this long twenty years' struggle and the horrors which have overwhelmed the wretched people of this land, I marvel till I know not how to contain my wonder that these things can be. It may be folly—it may even be sin—on my part to desire to understand better what monstrous delusion is working in their minds, but that I do desire a better comprehension

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of it I may not deny. Carlos, when our holy Church gives everything that the soul of man can desire—absolution for sin, peace and guidance to the erring, the Blessed Sacrament to give us strength and support, prayer and praise continually offered on behalf of all by a holy and separated priesthood; when we have here on earth the most solemn and beautiful worship that heart of man can conceive, and in the heaven above the Blessed Mother of our Lord and the holy saints ever interceding for us before the Throne of God, what more would they have? What can they ask or want that the Church cannot bestow? It is a thing that passes comprehension. It seems to me as though, could one but get face to face with them, one *must* be able to show them the blind error of their ways. And yet it can scarce be so, seeing that a generation has well-nigh been swept away by fire and sword, and still they go on in their obstinate blindness and ignorance. Yet, Carlos, all these men cannot be vile and wicked, nor yet fools and hypocrites. None can use such words respecting the Prince so lately dead. And he was one of this way of thinking."

"In his case it might well have been ambition," answered Carlos. "He would never have risen to the place he held had he not embraced the heresy of these rebellious burghers. For my own part, the delusions of heretics interest me not. From the beginning of the world we have always seen that men *will* turn away from the ordinances of God to walk in their own sinful lusts. It is just so with yon heretics there. They are setting them-

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selves up to teach God. Tush, Alphonso! they do not merit the thought thou givest them. They are fit food for the sword and the faggot. They have sold themselves to their father, the devil. Let them reap the wages he has for all his servants both in this life and in the world to come!"

"If it were only that they rebelled against the establishment of the Inquisition upon their soil, one could better understand it," remarked Alphonso, after a brief pause, unable to dismiss the matter from his thoughts in such summary fashion. "There be many of us loyal sons of the Church who love not the—"

"Hist, Alphonso! have a care what thou sayest!" exclaimed Carlos, with a quick look round him, the instinct of a fear which was ever present to the sons of a soil where the "Holy Office" lived and flourished being for the moment stronger than reason and common-sense. Here in Parma's camp, in the midst of a semi-hostile country, they were free from the espionage of priestly spies; but so many orthodox sons of the Church had been mysteriously haled off to the dungeons of the Inquisition, whence they had never returned, that none might feel himself altogether safe; and men who had never flinched before the deadliest perils of war turned pale with apprehension at the approach of the black-robed alguazils of the Inquisition. "Have a care what thou sayest, boy! Why, even here—" He stopped short and smiled, partly at his own nervousness, partly at the expression upon the face of his companion.

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"Here, methinks, we are safe, and may speak as man to man, *amigo mio*," said Alphonso, with a peculiar expression on his thoughtful countenance. "The Holy Office has been swept away from these lands, though men say it will soon be re-established here. It is just that which is the trouble and the puzzle, Carlos. The Holy Church is of God. When men resist her, they resist Him also. But the 'Holy Office,' as we are taught to call it, is that of God too? Is it possible that our Father in heaven has devised that likewise? And if not, are these heretics so very wrong in resisting it to the death?"

"Have a care, man, have a care of thy words and thy thoughts," cried Carlos again, with a look of anxiety upon his face that would have been ludicrous in so stalwart a soldier had it not been in effect so unspeakably sad. "It boots not to utter such words; nay, it were better not to think such thoughts. Why, man, in Madrid and Seville men have been sent to the rack and the stake for as little as thou hast spoken to-day. True, for the present moment we may be safe, but there is no knowing what breeze of heaven may carry a whisper to some holy father; and years later it may be remembered against thee. Believe me, *amigo mio*, it is not safe to toy with thought. It is not safe to begin to play with edged tools. Let the priests keep our consciences—so they will be safe; but to think for ourselves, to reason whether this or that be of God, smatters fearfully of heresy. It is not good, it is not wise even to dally with such thoughts in one's heart. That is how all heresy begins—men striving to settle for

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themselves hard questions they should leave to their spiritual fathers. It is the devil who prompts such thoughts, and if one has been harboured, it is ever followed by a crowd of successors; and where the end of that man will be, it boots not to ask. You and I are soldiers. We have our own duties to do; and so long as we confess as occasion serves, and attend our daily mass, we have no call to trouble our heads with aught else. Thou art something too curious, Alphonso. I have chidden thee before now for this same fault. It boots not in these days to think overmuch. It is ours to act. Let us leave the thinking to others, for—*pardiez!*—it always seems to lead to trouble."

Alphonso regarded his stalwart companion with a meditative smile that was one of neither assent nor satisfaction, yet expressed no opposition to advice which was undoubtedly sound. It was not the first recommendation of the kind which had been given him either by his brother or by the young Count of Cueva. Indeed, one of the things which were dwelling with persistent iteration in his mind just now was the peril which, amongst his own countrymen and those of the faith he held so dear, was said to attend the free exercise of thought.

Alphonso had not long emerged from the College at Salamanca, where he had received a very sound and liberal education for the times in which he lived, where thought in all other fields save that of religion had been freely encouraged, and where he had not realized the fact that in the paths of religion he had not been encouraged or

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permitted to think for himself. He had accepted teaching readily, and assimilated it rapidly; for his was a devout cast of mind, and hereditary reverence for the ancient forms was as strong with him as with the majority of his countrymen. When he had finished his course of studies, he joined his brother in the Netherlands, but brought with him into the camp his love of study and of analytical thought. Brought face to face in this way with the burning questions of the day, and with his keen wits greatly stirred by everything he saw and heard, it had been impossible for him not to be greatly moved by all that had been told him of this great struggle; and strive as he would against the feeling, he had been unable to withhold a certain amount of admiration for the men who had made such a stand against the institution of the Inquisition upon their soil.

With their rebellion against their monarch and with their heretical views Alphonso had no manner of sympathy; but in his heart of hearts he loathed the "Holy Office," as did also hundreds and thousands of his countrymen, though fear held them mute and passive. He had heard it often said that if Philip of Spain would pledge himself that there should be no Inquisition in the Netherlands, the people would return to their old submission. If that indeed were so, he could not but feel that they had no small show of right and justice on their side; and although, as one of Parma's soldiers, he would fight his utmost against the rebel host, he could not but feel a growing desire to understand better the motives that actu-

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ated them, and to learn from themselves something of the spirit which had been at the root of this twenty years' war. The people would not have suffered as they had done had not the cause commended itself to them as righteous. Alphonso was curious to know how it looked from their standpoint, and knew as little of the danger of his curiosity as of the speedy way in which his wish was to be accomplished.

But for the moment he was silenced, knowing that Carlos spoke wisely, according to his own light, and feeling that the counsel of his more experienced friend deserved attention.

"He is right to warn me," thought the young man, as he turned his face towards the city of Antwerp again. "It is dangerous to utter such words, I verily believe. Strange that the heretics have one such solid advantage over us! They, at least, are allowed to think for themselves. It is we who must hold our very thoughts in check lest they savour of the devil. I wonder which is the wiser way in the sight of God."

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CHAPTER VI.

INTO THE CITY.

"SHAME upon thee, Diego! shame upon thee!"

The swarthy Spaniard turned upon Alphonso with a laugh of savage glee. His hands as well as his sword were reeking with blood. Near at hand stood a score of Spanish soldiers, laughing also, and gory like their captain. They were looking at certain boats drifting towards the city, but proceeding thither simply by the action of the tide, and through no effort on the part of the crew, albeit it could just be seen that they were not empty.

Alphonso had surprised this little party at their sport, and now stood by the river-brink, his eyes scintillating with anger and scorn.

"You shame your manhood by acts like these!" he cried, addressing the soldiers, who were leisurely wiping their swords. "You sully the honour of the Spanish arms. In days to come, when these deeds are read, all the world will hold the name of Spain in execration, if these be her acts in warfare."

The men looked half indignant and half ashamed, but the careless mockery in Diego's eyes was unchanged.

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"Peace, foolish boy; make not thyself into a woman!" he said, with an assumption of contempt which perhaps he scarcely felt; for Alphonso's gallantry in action had been put to the proof times without number, and was absolutely incontestable. "Are we to stand by and see yon stubborn city victualled before our very eyes, whilst we are building our bridge to seal up the mouth of the river?"

"Nay; I said not so. Fall upon the provision-boats, and divert their stores into our magazines. But to what end are these cruelties inflicted on hapless prisoners? Some day it may be our turn to be prisoners in the hands of our foes. Wouldst like to think of being hacked and slashed in like fashion thyself?"

Diego shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"They probably will not ask me to choose my fate, if such ill chance befall me. But I misdoubt me whether it will ever be my fate to fall alive into the hands of the foe. I will die sword in hand first. Those beggarly burghers will prove no match for Diego de Escolano!"

Alphonso smiled slightly at the proud boast.

"Better men than thou or I have fallen into the hands of those same burghers ere now," he remarked; and then his face grew stern again as he looked once more in the direction of the city. "And if *this* is a sample of how the Prince of Parma's soldiers serve hapless men—ay, and women and children—what right have we to expect anything but a hideous death if it should be our fate to become prisoners in our turn?"

"The chances of war must be risked," said Diego care-

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lessly. "I trow I can die as boldly as another man when my turn comes."

"Belike thou canst; but when my turn comes to die, I would fain that death should find me with hands unstained by wanton cruelty; for I hold it no better than cowardice to inflict purposeless suffering on hapless prisoners who cannot defend themselves. Yea, thou dost colour at the words; thou dost not love to hear thyself dubbed coward. But I will not take it back. I trow when thou art thy better self thou wilt blush for what thou hast seen and done to-day."

Diego's face, dark for a moment, quickly relaxed into a mocking smile. Fierce, cruel, and reckless by nature, as the life he had led had helped to make him, he had a good side to his nature too; and one of his best traits was an exceeding fondness for Alphonso, albeit the two fell out so constantly that many of their acquaintances prophesied that there would be blood shed between them before they had done with one another. The friendship which had existed from boyhood had taught them a freedom of speech with each other which is seldom afterwards acquired. In battle they had stood shoulder to shoulder, and had done one another many a good turn in the heat and stress of the fight. But their characters and disposition were widely diverse, and differences were continually arising between them.

"Tush, boy! thou art half a woman, for all thy strong right arm and thy courage in battle. It is thou who wilt come to blush one day for thy squeamishness!

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What are these dogs of heretics to thee, that thou shouldest stand forth their champion? They are but receiving here a foretaste of what will be theirs to all eternity in a few short hours. Thy compassion is ill-placed. Had we despatched them, the devils would already have them in their clutches; they are better off as they are even with an arm or a leg missing. Save thy compassion for good sons of the Church. If thou hast not a care, thy priest will have cause to fear that thou thyself dost smell of heresy."

And Diego turned on his heel and marched off, leaving Alphonso standing at the water's edge alone.

"Dreaming again! and with a marvellous solemn face to boot! What now, Alphonso? Art still desiring to go visit yon heretic city? Hast thou not heard the good news? We have captured a whole cargo of corn and other provisions on its way to Antwerp. We shall fare better for the next few weeks than we have done of late."

For, although this fact was not well known to the enemy, the Spaniards were very imperfectly supplied with provisions or with money; and their great general was often in a sore strait to know how to keep his gallant little army together, and supply them with the necessaries of life.

"Yes, I have heard of that. I am glad enough of the food for our brave fellows, but I would that Diego had had no hand in the capture. His savage nature breaks forth within him when he has prisoners in his power. I loathe to think how he treats them!" And Alphonso

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related how the hapless Zeelanders had been served by their countrymen.

Carlos listened with an air of mingled indifference and disgust.

"Coward-cruelty in very sooth!" he answered; "and yet what would you have? Our fellows are brought up to war and butchery, and blood is no more to them than water. Would they be, as they are, the finest soldiers in Europe but for this strain of savagery in them? I misdoubt me if they would. Thou art something too fine a tool for this sort of warfare, Alphonso. Thy place is in the battle and in the council-chamber; but for the interludes of war thou hast little stomach. I will not say that thou art not in the right of it, but thou wilt never make others see as thou dost; and we want our Diegos in the camp as well as our more gentle Alphonsos."

"Diego is a brave fellow; I mean naught against him," said Alphonso quickly. "But methinks that we captains and officers should show to our men an example of merciful clemency towards the captives that fall into our hands. They are all too prone to cruelty themselves, without our setting the example."

"I deny it not," answered Carlos, in the same semi-careless fashion, as though the matter were one beyond his power to amend, and therefore of no strong personal interest to him. "But whilst human nature is what it is, thou wilt find it hard to get matters set to thy liking. Methinks we have all something of the savage in us at times. I know I feel it rising ever and anon within me—

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a demon of cruelty and ferocity which makes me loath to condemn others too quickly."

"Yet methinks our foes are less savage than we," said Alphonso thoughtfully, "though they have more cause, seeing how they have been served by us."

"I know not that," answered Carlos. "Thou hast heard, doubtless, how they did to death the man who slew the Prince of Orange. Have the annals of Spain any more savage record than that to show?"

"The provocation was sore," answered Alphonso. "In losing their Prince they doubtless felt they had well-nigh lost the cause which has cost them untold money and lives. One can scarce marvel at that outbreak of savage fury towards his assassin; yet I still maintain my point. I do not believe that those who have embraced the reformed faith, as they term it—have become traitors to his Majesty, and have apostatized from the Church—are as cruel in their dealings with their fellow-men as we sons of Spain. And I sometimes marvel why this is so. I would it were the other way. To my thinking, there is something more Godlike and more Christlike in tenderness and mercy than in the rack and the stake."

"Hist, Alphonso! Boy, thou art too careless in what thou sayest!" was the quick response. "I have told thee so a hundred times before. With me thou art safe; but I warn thee it is not good to let the fancy wander thus, nor to put such thoughts into words. Be content to fight, my friend, and leave the thinking to the priests and those who can understand such matters. Believe me, they are not

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subjects for thee to dabble in. Harm is sure to come of it if thou dost."

A dozen times of late had just such a similar warning fallen on Alphonso's ears. He was getting weary of the sound of it. Thought, he found, would not be chained and bound. Problems and perplexities were rising up daily before him; and yet whenever he ventured to hint at even the outer shell of the difficulty to some brother or friend, he was promptly pulled up with an anxious word of warning and rebuke. And the gist of it all was that it was not safe to reason or to think; such thinking and reasoning smacked far too much of heresy, and had been the first step in the fall of many into that deadly pitfall. Once and again had the hideous idea suggested itself to Alphonso that if thought were permitted to heretics, then heretics had the best of it. He had shivered and crossed himself even as the notion presented itself. It seemed to him like a whisper direct from the devil. And he dared not even breathe it in the confessional. He knew that men had been sent to the dungeons of the Inquisition for less. For the first time in his life, he had a secret sin unconfessed and unshriven. Sometimes he thought it must be a sign of God's anger against him that he could not shake off these troubling and haunting thoughts and questions.

His desire to know more and to hear more on the other side grew sensibly upon him, and his fancy for a secret visit to the city of Antwerp had not been forgotten. The notion had been taken up also by some of his comrades.

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It was just such a daring, hazardous adventure as was likely to tempt the bold spirits of Parma's little band of youthful leaders. To wander disguised through the streets of the beleaguered city, to pick up scraps of information which might be useful to their general, and to see and hear for themselves what was going on there, would be an undertaking of peril and of glory if once successfully achieved. The four comrades who had spoken of it were all good linguists, and spoke the language of the country with ease. French was to them almost as familiar as their mother tongue. And they resolved to pass along the streets in the disguise of Zeeland pilots; but if addressed, to use the French language. For the French alliance was high in favour in Antwerp, and Frenchmen were regarded with affection and confidence.

The summer days were beginning to wane, and yet the nights were warm and clear. If they could bring into the city at dusk a boat laden with grain, they reckoned that they could dispose of their load at the quays without betraying themselves, prowl about the city for some hours, and return before daylight to the camp. Their plans were arranged with some care; and all that remained to do was to capture an isolated boat, kill the crew and take their garments, and pilot it up to the city themselves.

Diego volunteered for this task, and kept a sharp look-out upon the river. Accordingly, one day, about an hour before sunset, a message was brought to the tent of the two brothers bidding them to a certain spot at the river's brink, near to which Diego's quarters were situated.

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"He has got the boat!" cried Rodrigo, starting up and girding on his sword. "We are to have our night's adventure at last. Come, Alphonso! This is thine expedition in very truth, for it was thy quick wits which first jumped at the notion. Marry, I shall be glad of any adventure that shall serve to break the long monotony of this siege, which has scarce begun to be called by the name, and which will cost us dear, I trow, before it is done."

Alphonso was also quickly accoutring himself. His face had lighted at sound of the message. He had a strange eagerness to see the city, which, in spite of the death of the Prince of Orange, and the fall and defection of one after another sister cities, was still hurling defiance at Parma, and vowing destruction sooner than surrender. He had thought of this secret visit until the notion had fired his brain completely. He little guessed what would be the end of the adventure, nor how long a time he was destined to spend within those city walls.

Down to the river's bank sped the two brothers, to find Carlos and Diego there before them. It was at a lonely little landing-place some way above the camp that a boat lay moored. Two or three soldiers were in charge of it, and in the bow, half scowling, but altogether cowed and submissive, sat an old weather-beaten Zeelander, anxiously watching the faces of those around him. There were traces which told that blood had been spilt on this spot not long before; and Alphonso shuddered a little as he quickly donned the rough dress allotted to him, realizing

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that its owner had been slain in order to furnish him with it. Had he been there he would have saved the lives of the crew, and sent them away unharmed; but such notions of clemency were utterly foreign to the mind of the Spanish soldier; and what wonder, when he was taught by his priest that every heretic slain by his hand took off a year from the time he himself was destined to spend in the fires of purgatory?

The rest of the party were conversing eagerly together.

"I should kill him," said Diego. "Dumb or not dumb, he might betray us if we take him with us."

"He has sworn not to do so," said Carlos, "and I think he is too much frightened to break his word. We run a great danger if we have to do the selling of the grain ourselves. We know nothing of their methods of dealing. We may betray ourselves in a hundred ways. This fellow is no doubt well known in the city. I make no question it is our fellows who have cut out his tongue not long since, for the wound is barely healed. We can leave him to see to the sale of the grain, and slip off ourselves in the dusk. No one will have paid special heed to us; and though this fellow may try to make them understand afterwards, I misdoubt me if he will succeed. He will have a wholesome fear of drawing down a worse thing upon himself, and he could not possibly describe us. I do not believe he could make anybody in the city understand what he meant. He is not a native; he is but a Zeelander, and he is only lately made dumb. He cannot have learned to make others readily understand him. I think

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the risk of taking will be less than the risk of going without him."

There was some little discussion on this point, but in the end the advice of Carlos prevailed. All the four youths saw that to attempt to carry on the traffic themselves would expose them to peril; whilst if they left it to the old Zeelander, no surprise would be raised. They would make a pretence for a few moments of being busy about the cargo; but they would quickly slip off in the darkness—for they did not intend to reach the city till it was dark—and it was not likely their movement would arouse suspicion on the part of those about. Their dress and their manner of entrance would protect them; and the old mute would find it difficult to make anybody understand him, even did he try to tell his tale.

If by any chance they discovered when they wished to return that the boat was watched, they could devise escape by some other means. Fear was unknown to any of them; and all were hardy and expert swimmers. If the worst came to the worst, they could dive into the river and swim down with the retiring tide, which ran out very strong at the ebb. They would but have to keep themselves afloat; the current would do all the rest.

The old man could understand what was spoken to him, though he could reply only by signs. In the most solemn way he intimated that he would hold his peace if his life were spared. He undertook to do the bidding of his captors, and not try to draw attention to them; and the fact that any of them could strike or shoot him dead at a

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moment's notice was a possible inducement to him to keep faith. Of course when he once got into the city and was surrounded by friends, he might feel differently; but then, as Carlos observed, he was plainly a regular Zeeland skipper, and probably made his living by bringing grain-boats into Antwerp. He would very well know that if he betrayed trust, and if these young Spanish captains did not return from the city safe and sound, he would be mercilessly watched for by the soldiers all along the banks; and if once he fell into their hands, he would certainly be put to death with every refinement of cruelty that suggested itself to them. Indeed, the soldiers had openly warned him of this; and therefore his silent protestations of good faith were held to be of some possible value.

The sun was just dipping behind the low-lying clouds which hid the horizon as the boat put off with its five passengers, who looked wonderfully like the rough Zeeland fishermen they professed to be. Diego's swarthy face, with the week's growth of beard he had allowed to grow there in prospect of this expedition, was in wonderful harmony with his rough dress; and the other three wore their hats low down over their eyes, and pulled up the collars of their rough tunics, so as to hide their faces with tolerable success. The light was fading fast as the boat cut its way through the water, and though it was fired on from time to time as it ran beneath one of the hostile forts, no concerted attack was made upon it—a solitary sloop scarcely merited that effort—and it passed on its way unscathed.

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And now the towers and spires of the city began to loom up against the darkening sky; and here and there lights shone out, showing that the day was done indeed, and that the streets would be more or less deserted.

As they glided past the partially ruined and dismantled citadel, they were challenged by the guard; but the old man in the bow uttered a strange cry, and the boat was allowed to proceed unmolested on its way. The Zeeland boats were well known in Antwerp, and were received with eager gladness.

A little further on the old man made signs to run the boat into a narrow aperture, and by gestures counselled his captors to disembark there. All was intensely still. They ran no danger of being seen by prying eyes. It was absolutely dark in the little creek, though there was a regular landing-place, led down to by steps from some upper level, and it was plainly a place where boats were accustomed to come in.

"We may just as well risk it here as elsewhere," said Carlos, who had unconsciously taken command of the expedition, as he was wont to do. "All seems quiet and secure. And if we be seen emerging into the streets, our dress will deceive all who see us. Come, let us delay no longer. Ye have all your arms safe about you?"

One by one they stepped ashore, and the old man pushed off the boat with a silent nod, as Carlos in low tones instructed him to meet them at the same spot some few hours later, after he had disembarked his store. The creek where they had landed was a little above the frown-

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ing walls of the citadel, and close to the Bastion of St. Michael. They heard the measured tread of sentries, and their voices close at hand; but creeping along the narrow lane in which they found themselves, they soon lost these sounds in the distance, and emerged into the more wide and open streets where a few foot-passengers were to be seen moving to and fro about their business.

The aspect of the city was peaceful enough now. The moon was rising and giving sufficiency of light, and from many an uncurtained window a broad shaft of light fell athwart the duskiness of the outside world, and showed a glimpse of a warm and picturesque interior, upon which the sons of the camp looked with curiosity not unmixed with envy.

"Better off are the besieged than the besiegers," said Carlos, with a laugh. "They seem in marvellous happy and peaceful mood. Those well-spread tables speak not of poverty or starvation. We fare far worse in the camp. I wonder what they would think, those honest burgher folk, if they knew that their foes were quietly watching them without!"

"Dogs of heretics—greasy burghers! Would they were all in our clutches!" muttered Diego fiercely between his shut teeth. "What have we here? An open square and a great church. Ah, that will be the church of Our Lady, that those pestilent and blasphemous heretics so maltreated years ago—vile scum of a vile nation! The sons of the Church must never forget that sin against them!"

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"There is yet another church over yonder," said Alphonso. "Methinks there is service going on. I would fain go and see. It looks to me as though it might be one of our churches. See the crucifix without, and the image of our Blessed Mother of God. Let me go and see."

"Do so, an thou wilt; Rodrigo and I will make our tour of the fortifications, and mark those things the Prince most wished to know. It were better not to keep all together. We shall attract less observation in couples. Thou hast come to see the people; we the place. Have a care to thyself, Alphonso; and be at the trysting-place in good time. Let not thy face be too much seen; as for our dress, no man heeds it. We are safe enough so long as we attract the notice of none."

"Good," answered Alphonso, who was ready enough to be left to follow his own fancies. "I will not fail you at the turn of the tide. I have marked well the way, and can find the place again. Fare you well till we meet again." And so saying, the young man passed on his way towards the lighted church.

"Is it safe to leave him?" questioned Rodrigo. "The boy will not betray himself, I trust?"

"He is no fool," returned Carlos, smiling; "and he has set his heart on some purpose of his own. We must needs do the behests of the Prince. We are not here solely for our own pleasure.—Diego, what wilt thou do—come with us, or remain here?"

"I trow somebody had better have an eye to yon boy, lest some of the greasy burghers make a heretic of him

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outright, ere he knows what is happening to himself. He is half bewitched as it is," and Diego crossed himself as he spoke. "I will have an eye to him, that he gets not into some fool's mischief."

"And get not thou into some fool's quarrel thyself," counselled Carlos, with a smile, as he turned away, taking Rodrigo by the arm. "Have a care of thy temper, man, and remember that thou art alone in a hostile city, where a rash word may mean death;" and the pair strode away in the darkness, leaving Diego in the open street watching for the reappearance of Alphonso. They were not sorry that the youngest of their party had this stout comrade to watch over him, though they would have been better pleased had Diego possessed a somewhat less fiery temper and a little more self-control. Still he was very much devoted to Alphonso, and would lay down his life sooner than that harm should come to the "boy," as he was fond of dubbing him.

Alphonso, in the little Romanist chapel he had entered (there were very few such now in Antwerp), was looking about him, greatly enjoying the soft music which floated through the building, and kneeling reverently before some shrine, glad to see that there were other worshippers besides himself in the building, and that the "true faith" had not died out in Antwerp yet. As a matter of fact, there were large numbers of the inhabitants still loyal to the Roman Catholic faith, although these were almost as much opposed to the Spanish monarch's tyrannical rule as the Protestants. They dreaded the Inquisition

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only a little less than their brethren, and hated the subversion of the ancient constitution, and the military terrorism and despotism, quite as much. So that in the present crisis men of both forms of faith were united in a common cause; and Alphonso had hardly realized how much of the ancient faith still remained in the city that the Spaniards were now trying to bring to submission.

It was to him a great privilege to kneel once more, in a beautiful building, before the shrine of the Blessed Mother of the Lord. All that was most devotional in his nature was stirred within him by the sound of the floating music, the faint sweet fragrance of incense, the lights, the flowers, the picture of our Lady—a wonderful painting upon which his eyes dwelt with loving adoration. For a moment he forgot where he was—forgot the object for which he had come—forgot everything but the ecstatic worship of the Virgin Mother. And he was only aroused from his trance of adoration by the voices of two men who had halted near to him. He could not see their faces, but their voices—they were speaking in the French tongue—came clearly to his ears.

"Look there, my friend," said one voice. "Thou canst not say that our faith is a worn-out thing, and that our forms are void, when thou seest devotion like that in a rough fisher youth."

"I have never said that thy faith was void," came the answer, spoken in a clear and thoughtful tone that fell pleasantly on Alphonso's ears. "We of the two faiths, as

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men love to call them, should rather say of ourselves that we are of the one faith; for there is but one, if we go to the very root and heart of the matter—'one faith, one Lord, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, in whom are *all*.' My good friend, if thou wert free to read the Word of God, thou wouldst know that those are His own inspired words, and that He has bound us all together into one Communion in His Son Christ Jesus. We Protestants believe in the Lord Jesus even as you do; therefore in God's sight we are all one. It is by the device of man that we are divided into hostile camps. God would have us all come to Him 'in the unity of the faith.'"

"Ay, verily—in the unity of the faith," answered his companion quickly. "And yet you and those of your way of thinking would tear down and uproot this very unity which the Church has struggled to maintain intact from the days of the Apostles."

"'The unity of the faith—in the bond of peace,'" continued the quiet voice of the other speaker; "that is how the passage runs. My good friend, I have no desire to enter upon a controversy with you, least of all in this hallowed place—for I hold that any building which has been solemnly dedicated and consecrated to the service of God is hallowed; but if you accept one part of the quotation, you must fain take the other also. The bond of peace is God's will as much as the unity of the faith. Is peace secured by the rack, the faggot, and the sword?"

"But to preserve the unity of the Church—"

"My good friend, what has been the result of this en-

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deavour to maintain your so-called unity? Do you seriously believe that by torturing men's bodies you will convince their understandings? What remotest connection is there betwixt pain of body and conformity of thought? You may wring false confessions from them. You may frighten them into submission. You may threaten them into silence. But is *that* your vaunted unity? Is that unity in the sight of God? Tush, man! you outrage every one of God's laws to gain—what? A miserable outward uniformity which does but cover a deadlier feud and bitterer hatred than is ever to be found at the sword's point. The fruits of the Spirit are Love, Joy, Peace; and we are bidden to judge of a tree by its fruits. Tried by that standard, where would the Church of Rome be found? Terror, desolation, hatred, violence, spring up around her steps when she unsheathes her sword against those who are baptized followers of the Son of God. May God in His mercy pardon her the fearful crimes done in her name—and, alas, in His!"

And then the speakers moved away out of ear-shot, whilst Alphonso stood up and looked after them with a strange expression on his face.

He saw very plainly the face of the speaker whose speech had proved him to be what *his* world called "a pestilent heretic." Alphonso was tingling yet with surprise and dismay at the boldness of the words he had heard. Was it really true that men could thus speak out their innermost thoughts one to another, no man forbidding them? Could it be right? Was it not a sign of a fearful apos-

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tasy? A sudden wild longing came over him to follow the tall, stalwart man with the fine, intellectual face, and ask questions of him—questions which had for long been stirring within his own brain, though he had been almost afraid to give them place. How could he possibly frame his thoughts in words? Surely it was some temptation of the devil! He would put it away from him and resist it to the last.

But the spell of his devotions was snapped. He could not recommence his prayers. He wandered to the door of the church, and hardly had he got there before he became aware of a tumult and commotion going on without.

"A Spaniard! a Spaniard! A spy! a spy!"

On every side were these words being shouted, and over there, in the middle of the square hard by, a great tumult was going on, the crowd swaying and yelling, closing round some object which was plainly shifting its position from moment to moment. It did not take Alphonso two seconds to realize that Diego had been discovered, and was being set upon by the infuriated crowd which had gathered with the wonderful celerity usual on such occasions.

With no thought of himself, but only of his comrade's peril, Alphonso drew his sword, and making a detour—he saw from the steps of the church how the tide of battle was going, and to what spot Diego was directing his steps—he slipped along beneath the buildings of the square, and by a great rush he succeeded in reaching his comrade, just as he arrived at a spot where a wide street abutted upon the open square.

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"Save thyself, Alphonso! leave me to my fate!" gasped Diego, who was fearfully wounded and battered by the blows and missiles aimed at him by the rabble rout. But Alphonso had already placed himself before his comrade, and had cut down the foremost of his assailants.

"Another, another! a Spaniard! a spy!" yelled the mob, in wildly-increasing fury. But just for the moment they recoiled from the shining blade of this new adversary, and Alphonso was able to drag his almost fainting comrade into the shelter of a great porch a few paces down the wide street, where he stood over him defending him with his sword, and receiving a perfect hail of blows from the weapons of the foremost in the crowd, as well as from missiles hurled from behind.

It was a desperate encounter, and he knew that it could end but one way. The only thing was to sell his life as dearly as possible. Already he was growing faint from loss of blood, and had begun to doubt whether all was not a fearful dream, when he heard the tones of a resolute voice, which somehow seemed familiar to him, demanding a passage through the crowd; and then something struck him on the head, and he knew no more, for darkness came over him and swallowed him completely up.

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CHAPTER VII.

PRISONERS.

WHEN Alphonso opened his eyes once more, it seemed to him as though there had been some great blank in his life—as though he had passed in some inexplicable way into a new phase of existence, and had awakened in a new world.

For many months past he had slept upon a hard, narrow camp bed under canvas, and had awakened to the sound of military challenge and salute, the clang of arms, and the bustle of a camp. Now, although it was too dark to see much of his surroundings, he was aware that he was lying in a soft bed; that his head, which seemed too heavy to move, was pillowed on down; and that snowy sheets and warm, light bed-clothing covered him. A deep silence was about him—none of the familiar sounds to which he had been used—no tramp of sentry or stamping of picketed horses. Far away in the clear, still air rang out the chimes of some clock, and presently four heavy strokes proclaimed the hour.

"Where am I? what means it all?" asked Alphonso of himself. With a great effort he strove to shake off

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the oppressive sense of languor which overpowered him, and to lift his head to look about him.

But a thrill of keen pain, first through his temples and then in his side, warned him that he had better let well alone. He sank back on his pillow, catching his breath in quick gasps, and for a while he lost all consciousness of his surroundings.

When again he opened his eyes, the daylight had begun to steal into the room from a large latticed window on his right hand. As he lay he could see an expanse of blue sky, bright with the early sunshine of an autumn morning; whilst rising in stately grace, and cleaving this blue of the firmament, was a graceful towering spire, crowned with its cross of open stone-work. Then from below there began to arise sounds of life—peaceful life—the sounds of a city awaking to a new day. The window stood open, and Alphonso heard greetings passing between one and another, as the inhabitants unbarred their doors or windows and caught sight of their neighbours doing the like. All these greetings were in the Dutch tongue, and this more than anything else helped Alphonso to recollect where he was and what had befallen him.

"Antwerp!" he said to himself—"surely I must be in Antwerp! Yes, I remember now. I went thither with my brother, and with Carlos and Diego. I was in the church; there was a tumult without. Yes—it is all coming back! It was Diego who was in peril. They were bearing him down, crying out that he was a Spaniard and a spy. I remember all now. We were together in a

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doorway, making a last stand for our lives. That is all that I can recollect. Some hand struck me down, and I know no more. What can have befallen us since? Sure this is not the way that prisoners are lodged in Antwerp!"

The light was growing broader and clearer. Weary as were his eyes, difficult as he found it to move even his head or his hand, leaden as was the weight which seemed to be pressing upon all his limbs and even upon all his senses, he could not refrain from a careful scrutiny of his surroundings; and as his eyes roved round the spacious panelled room, which seemed actually to shine with cleanliness and careful keeping, they lighted suddenly upon another white bed with another helpless occupant, and a quick exclamation rose to Alphonso's lips.

"Diego! surely that is Diego!"

All he could see was a dark head and a small piece of a swarthy face, for the rest of the countenance was so swathed in linen bandages as to be absolutely hidden, whilst from the way in which his comrade was lying, and from the adjustment of the coverings over him, it was plain that he had been very seriously hurt, and that he had also been very carefully and skilfully tended.

But how had this thing come about? They were in the city of their foes. They had entered that city as spies, and had been discovered and set upon by the angry populace. How, then, came they to be lying thus —not in a dank, foul dungeon, where prisoners were wont to find themselves, but in some house whose master must

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be a man of station and of wealth? for no humble citizen would have a guest-chamber of such fine proportions, or bedding and linen so soft and white. Alphonso had scarce ever lain in such a bed before. His tired head could not solve the problem. The attempt to think brought back that shooting pain in his temples. He closed his eyes, and resolved to let things unfold themselves as they would. Perchance it was all some fevered dream, from which he should awake to find himself in his own tent or in some dark prison-cell.

He shivered slightly as that thought came to him. He could not but remember how his own countrymen had served prisoners who had fallen into their hands. Suppose he were to be dragged forth to be cut in pieces for the amusement of the soldiers, or torn limb from limb in order to extort from him some confession of beliefs he did not hold! Aching in every joint, knowing that every rough movement would be agony to him, the shiver was natural enough. There was something in the uncertainty and bewilderment of the situation that aroused him, despite his weariness and intense languor, and kept him from sinking back into passive restfulness. Into what sort of place had they come, and what would be their ultimate fate? They were certainly captives in the hands of the foe—on that point he could entertain no doubt. But why this spacious chamber and these luxurious surroundings? That was the puzzle he could not solve. Prisoners were not wont to be treated thus—least of all in times of implacable warfare.

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A slight sound at the far end of the room caused him to turn his head very slightly. The door was opening gently, and with soft footfalls two persons came quietly in.

The first of these was a little old lady, with a spotless cap tied over her white hair, her dark dress exceedingly neat and trim, yet with a look of finish and dainty grace impossible adequately to describe. She carried carefully in her hands a steaming bowl, which gave forth an appetizing odour; and she moved without any sound over the polished boards of the floor, her bright, dark eyes fixed not upon Alphonso, but upon his unconscious comrade, who appeared to be her first object of care.

Behind her came a young girl, tall, slim, and graceful—such a creature as Alphonso had not looked upon for many a long day. Her hair beneath its dainty kerchief looked like threads of burnished gold. Her eyes were a beautiful violet blue in colour, and were shaded by long, dark lashes. She, too, was very plainly dressed, but the dress fitted her slim figure and showed off its trim proportions, the white apron was as spotless as snow, and the girdle and little scarf were worn with dainty grace that gave a touch of picturesque quaintness to the costume. If the skirt were short and plain, at least it allowed the embroidery of the stockings and the pretty buckled shoes to be seen. Alphonso was in no mood to criticise the Dutch burgher costume, or compare it unfavourably with the more flowing and graceful fashion of the daughters of the south; for he thought he had seldom seen a prettier picture than that presented by

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the pair before his eyes. They seemed to him like some beneficent fairies come to poor prisoners in their hour of need.

Both the women went across to Diego's bed without looking towards Alphonso. They were used to finding both their charges in the same state of unconsciousness, and they spoke aloud, though in quiet tones, as they bent over this bed.

"I wonder if he will ever open his eyes," said the girl, in the Dutch tongue and in a very sweet voice. "Lionel thinks he may sink and die without ever knowing anything about it. He is dreadfully hurt—scarce a bone that is not broken. But he takes all you give him, grandmother. Do dying men eat with such readiness?"

"He is not dying, child," answered the old woman, as she fed her patient with a skill and aptitude which showed her to be no mean nurse. "I verily believe he will recover, though it may be tedious. These soldiers, bred up to the use of arms, have iron frames, and can go through wonderful hardships. But he is restless; he has disturbed his dressings. See, child: take thou the basin to the other, and get him to feed if thou canst, whilst I set matters straight here. If these bones are to set aright, these bandages must be tightened and adjusted. But it is time the other was fed. I think I can manage alone."

"The other is the one I like," said the girl, as she took the basin. "He has such a gentle face, and Lionel says he saw him saying his prayers in the little chapel just

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before the tumult began. This one looks so fierce—perhaps that scar right across his face, and the bruises, add to that look; but I feel as though I should fear him were he whole. He seems like one of those fierce, cruel Spaniards of whom we read; but the other is quite different."

As the girl turned towards him, Alphonso instinctively closed his eyes. He would not let her know that he had heard her words. But as she approached and bent over him, they flashed open once again, and met her startled gaze with a look of full consciousness.

"*Perdonate me, Señorita,*" he began instinctively, but found his voice so low and weak that it was barely audible to himself. The girl had started back a little on meeting his glance, and now looked over at the elder woman, who came quickly across the floor towards him.

"Ah, sir," she said, speaking in very good French, "I see that you have returned to your senses. I trust you will shortly be better. But do not try to speak yet. Take the nourishment we have brought you; that will give you some strength." And signing to the girl to feed him, she moved back to her other patient, over whom she quickly became much engrossed.

"Will you not take the soup, monsieur?" asked the girl, also in French, the sweetness of her voice again striking him strangely; "it will do you good."

He obeyed, she feeding him the while as though he were a child; for he was unable to raise his head from the pillow, and when he attempted this, was conscious of the

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same sharp thrill of pain through his temples which made everything swim before his eyes.

"Do not try to move," said the girl gently. "You have had some very bad blows upon the head. It will be some time before you will be able to help yourself."

The strong hot soup had given him strength; and when the pain and dizziness had a little gone off, Alphonso looked up into the girl's sweet face, and asked, in rather stronger accents than before, speaking this time in her own language, as he supposed Dutch to be,—

"Will you tell me where I am, Mejuffrouw, and how it comes that I am in this strange hap?"

"You are in Antwerp, sir," answered the girl quietly; "in the house of my brother and our grand-parents, in the porch of which you and your companion took refuge when you were assailed by the angry people."

"And you took us in, enemies though we be?"

A little flush rose in the cheek of the girl, but she answered, quietly and gently,—

"Nay, sir; we are taught not to regard as enemies those who are in need of our tendance and care. None are enemies who are helpless and wounded. And even if they were, we are bidden to love and care for them."

"To love your enemies?" questioned Alphonso, with a look of wonder in his liquid dark eyes. "Fair maiden, who has bidden you do that?"

"Our Lord Jesus Christ," answered the girl gently. "Those are His own words. I could show the place in the holy book; but I trow that you would not be allowed to

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look thereon. It is only we who may read for ourselves the words of life."

Alphonso was silent, for it was almost impossible for him to think or speak; but he realized, for all that, that he was speaking with a heretic, and that this fair girl, who had come to him on this errand of mercy, was one of those beings whom his priest and his sovereign would doom to the dungeons of the Inquisition. For many weeks he had been questioning within himself what manner of men these burgher heretics might be. Verily he seemed about to learn the answers to his questions in a fashion he had little dreamed of! For here was he a guest or a prisoner (which was it?) beneath the roof of one of these very men, and was receiving meat and drink from the hands of his kinswoman.

The girl said no more, but went across to assist the old lady with the other patient, who was groaning somewhat as they set his bed to rights, though plainly without any consciousness of his surroundings. When the pair came over to him again, he asked how it fared with his comrade, and heard that he was progressing favourably, although he had received so many bad blows that it must of necessity be a very long time before he could in any wise recover.

"And now, sir, I must look to your wounds, for they are grave enough," said the old lady; "and I am surgeon in this house, save for matters of very grave moment. Will you trust yourself to my skill?"

"Most willingly, madam; and I give you great thanks for your goodness to a stranger and an enemy. I trust

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the day may come when I shall be able to return you thanks by something better than idle words."

"We look for no thanks for doing our duty, sir," answered the old lady, with simple dignity.—"Maud, child, run thou below, and tell thy brother Lionel, if he be within, that this gentleman has recovered his senses. It may well be that he would like to know it; and he can assist me instead of thee."

The girl retired obediently, and in a very few minutes there entered a tall, fine-looking man whose face somehow seemed familiar to Alphonso, and the moment he heard his voice he knew who it was—the man who had paused beside him in the chapel, and had spoken of being of the Protestant persuasion, at the same time claiming brotherhood in a most bold and strange fashion with those of the ancient faith. And surely he was acting now as though he could live up to the standard he had laid down, for here was he sheltering within the walls of his house two of his foes—men who belonged not only to his religious opponents, but to the camp of the beleaguering host.

"Good-morrow, Señor," he said, with quiet courtesy. "I hear from my sister that you are on the road to recovery. Is this so?"

"Thanks to your great kindness and hospitality, I trust it is," answered Alphonso; "but I am yet bewildered to know where I am and how I came here."

"You shall learn all you wish to know anon, Señor," was the tranquil response; "but for the moment we will rather see to your hurts. I fear you were seriously injured

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by the infuriated rabble; but their excuse must be that they had been highly incensed at some gratuitous barbarities inflicted upon hapless Zeeland sailors, and would have been well pleased to serve you and your comrade the same. But fortunately you had fled for shelter to the porch of this house, and we were able to draw you within our doors. And I have the consent of the Burgomaster to retain you here as my prisoners, at least until you be sound of your hurts, if you will pass your word to make no attempt to take advantage of this grace by trying to escape."

"I give my parole willingly," answered Alphonso, though he winced a little at the word "prisoner," "and return you many thanks for this favour and grace shown to us."

Lionel Wilford bent his head in acknowledgment, and proceeded to assist his mother-in-law to examine the many hurts which the luckless young Spaniard had sustained.

Alphonso's left arm had been badly crushed and broken, and there was a torn jagged wound extending from wrist to elbow which wore an ugly inflammatory appearance, and made the old lady shake her head when the bandages were unloosed. In addition to this the patient had received numerous severe blows and kicks which had produced internal inflammation of a grave nature, and he was suffering considerable pain, which increased with every movement. Hitherto, though he had seen some sharp fighting, he had had the good fortune to escape without any great injury—a few flesh wounds and contusions being all he had received. He had never been reduced to

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the helpless state that he was now in, nor had he learned by actual experience what severe suffering was like. He set his teeth hard, and let no sound escape him as his hurts were tended; but his face showed how severe was the pain endured, and the subsequent exhaustion was so great that he fell once more into a semi-conscious state, and remained so for many hours, conscious of great physical pain, but of very little else.

He was just aware that people came and went as the long hours dragged by, that there were voices sometimes about his bed, and that he was refreshed with cooling draughts which were very welcome to his parched lips. As the sunshine faded from the room, and the cool evening breeze stole in through the open lattice, he began to come to himself once more. He opened his eyes to note once again the face of the fair-haired maiden he had seen before. She was sitting beside him gently fanning him, her eyes bent upon the page of an open book upon her knee. She was so unconscious of his scrutiny that he had time to look long at her before she knew herself observed.

It was a wonderfully attractive face, he thought, still and pensive now in repose, but capable, as he felt assured, of waking up into vivacity and animation at other times. The curved lips showed resolution as well as tenderness and girlish sweetness; the long lashes only partially veiled the blue eyes that could soften or sparkle or laugh with almost childish glee. The soft pale colouring of the face seemed beautiful to him after the olive swarthiness of so many of his own countrywomen. Altogether the counte-

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nance of this girl attracted him strangely; and when she suddenly looked at him and found him once more regarding her, he smiled, and was rewarded by seeing an answering smile upon her face.

"You are too good to me, Señorita," he said. "I know not how to thank you—and yours."

"We do not want thanks, Señor," answered the girl gently. "I trust you are suffering less pain. We hoped the potion mixed for you would in time give you relief."

"I think it has; I am grateful indeed," answered Alphonso. "Will you tell me how the time has sped since that night when we were surrounded and attacked by the populace in your city? How long since was it?"

"Three days from this evening. We were about to assemble for evening prayer, and were awaiting my brother, who had not yet come in—my eldest brother, whom you have seen to-day. We were all assembled in the room below—there are very many of us in this household, as you will learn in time if you remain with us till you are whole—when suddenly we heard the sound of a great tumult in the square yonder. Our windows do not look upon it, yet we are nigh at hand, and from these upper casements one can almost espy what goes on there. There was a great clamour of voices and hideous shouts, and the noise drew nearer and nearer to our house. Our brothers rushed out upon the balcony, and we heard cries of 'Spanish spies!' and saw that some pursuit was going on. Then in the darkness it seemed as though the pursued took refuge beneath our windows in the porch below, and almost

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immediately we heard my brother's voice calling the crowd to order, as he forced his way into the midst of them. The other brothers rushed down to help him, and there was confusion in the house. And then we heard sounds as though some heavy bodies were being dragged in, and the door was closed with a bang. The people outside yelled and hooted; but Lionel went out to them on the balcony and said that they had all but killed their victims, and that he would be responsible for their safe-keeping, but would not have them hacked to pieces in the shelter of his porch. My brother is well known in the city, and though some strive to flout him because he is an Englishman, he is really trusted and respected by all. So the crowd dispersed; and we found that we had two men, sorely hurt, and in the garb of Zeeland fishermen, lying within the threshold of our home. That they were Spaniards we could not doubt, though how the populace had discovered this we knew not."

"That is what I would fain know," said Alphonso, who had listened eagerly to the tale. "I was within the chapel when the riot began, and hastened to the assistance of my comrade without, who had been set upon in my absence. He has a dark, swarthy skin, but in the dusk methinks that would scarce be seen."

"Ah, but we found afterwards that he had knocked down a lad who had failed to bend the knee in passing the image of the Virgin set up at the corner of the square, but had made some mocking remark instead. I fear me that the remark might be such as to stir the blood of

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your nation; and the Spaniards are not beloved here, Señor, and there are many who speak scorn alike of them and of practices that we hold to be idolatrous. But be that as it may, the lad was knocked down, and almost at once the shout of 'Spanish spy!' was raised; and the rest I have told. Our townsfolk are even more incensed against the Spaniards than is their wont, for their cruel treatment of our brave Zeeland allies who are trying to supply the city with grain. But I am well assured that those evil deeds can be no doing of yours. And even if it were, we are bidden by our faith to return good for evil."

"As indeed you have done, lady," answered Alphonso in a low tone, as he glanced across at the motionless form of his comrade, wondering if this mercy would still be extended to him were it known that he was indeed the perpetrator of those ghastly cruelties which had so incensed the people of the town. "We do not deserve such grace at your hands. I marvel we were not left to the mercies of the crowd."

"Perchance it will prove no such great grace to have saved you from violent death," answered the girl thoughtfully; "for you must remain prisoners in a hostile city, unless perchance you may be exchanged as the siege goes on, if we lose some of our leading citizens. My brother will strive to keep you in his house till your wounds and hurts be healed; but he may not be able to befriend you longer than that, and captivity must be hard to bear in a hostile town and amongst foes."

"Only that in this town foes seem to be the best of

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friends," answered the young man, with a smile. "But tell me, I pray you, lady, of my comrade. It is strange to see him lie thus, without sign of life. Is he very sorely hurt? He seems to have no knowledge of what passes about him; he does but lie and breathe."

"Ay: he has some sort of concussion of the brain, and all his limbs be broken too. But there is no hurt that is mortal; and our grandam says that he will recover, and that it will be well for him if he comes not to his senses too quickly. Lying still as he now does, the bones may knit themselves together the faster. But how came it, Señor, that you and he were thus found in the heart of the city at nightfall and alone?"

Alphonso was nothing loath to tell his tale, and the girl listened with breathless interest. He had hardly begun before a fair-haired youth, with a strong likeness to the girl beside him, looked into the room and then came forward.

"It is my brother Malcolm—he would fain hear all too," she said; and the patient continued his story, eagerly listened to by both brother and sister.

"It was a bold thing to do, Señor," said Malcolm at the close; "and I trow your brother and friend have got off safe, else should we have heard by now of their capture. We citizens of Antwerp are not to be trifled with when our blood is up. It was a near thing that you escaped with life; and I trow you will remember the welcome you received for many long days to come! They say you are battered well-nigh into a jelly."

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"You think our comrades were not captured?" questioned Alphonso eagerly. "I feared perchance we had all been betrayed by the old dumb sailor, and that their captivity might be less merciful than ours."

"We should have heard had there been more Spaniards taken in the city that night," answered Malcolm decidedly. "I do not think you were betrayed save by the violence of your comrade there. The brawl was begun by him, and as no Zeeland fisherman would have so comported himself, it was easy to guess that he was a disguised spy who had forgotten caution. You have him to thank for this captivity."

Strange to say, Alphonso was wondrously content with his present surroundings. Perhaps physical weakness had something to do with this; exhaustion and pain had taken a great deal of the fighting spirit out of him for the moment, and he was disposed to lie passive, just waiting for what befell him, and thankful to be in such kind keeping. But over and above this physical inability to rebel against fate was a deeper and more permanent feeling of interest in those who ranked as his foes, and a keen desire to know more of them and of their feelings and opinions—the curiosity, in fact, which had been at the bottom of the enterprise that had ended for him in helplessness and captivity. Kind fortune had certainly favoured him in leading him to this haven of rest. Here he would of necessity learn all that he wished to know, and come to have a comprehension of those very matters which had been exercising his mind for many long weeks. A pris-

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oner on parole, in the heart of a burgher family holding the reformed opinion, how could he be better placed for entering into their ideas with comprehension, although probably with deep reprehension also? Perchance it might even be given to him to rescue this fair girl from the clutches of heresy, and restore her to the bosom of the true Church. Doubtless she had grown up in ignorance of the teachings of that Church. If she were to him a ministrant of the good things of the body, might not he be to her as a messenger from God, pointing out to her the deadly peril in which she stood, and leading her gently back to the true fold?

But in the present there was little opportunity of quiet talk with her. As soon as it was an established fact that he had recovered consciousness, and knew who was with him, the girl came but little to his bedside, and never alone. The days were very long and full of suffering for Alphonso. He had received grave hurts, and the inflammation ran high, causing him the most acute pain—pain which in those days there was scant means of alleviating, and which brought with it fever and exhaustion so great that his life was often in danger.

After one very bad day, when access after access of violent pain had left him more dead than alive, and he was lying in that state of exhaustion which seemed to simulate death itself, though his mind was clear and his consciousness seemed rather stimulated than impaired, he was aware that two or three persons had come in, and were holding some kind of consultation over his head.

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It was a great effort to lift his eyelids and look who they were; but he made the effort, and satisfied himself.

He knew by this time the composition of this mixed household, and had a vague knowledge of most of its members. Lionel, his father, and father-in-law were the persons in consultation, and although the patient appeared absolutely incapable of hearing what passed, he was aware of every word spoken.

"Ought we not to have a priest to see him?" said Lionel; "he is not able to ask for what he wants, and he might not believe that we would do his bidding in that matter even though he were. But if he be dying—and he certainly seems like to die—it is only common Christian charity to soothe his last hours, if it be possible. Father Andrew is a good man, and he would come to him, I think, foreign and Spanish spy though he be. Shall we send and ask him?"

"What good can a priest do him?" answered the slow voice of Van der Hammer. "If he be dying, he is going straight before the judgment-seat of his God. What then will avail the rites and ordinances of man? If he cannot plead the death of his Saviour in expiation of his sins, there is nothing else that he can plead, nothing else that can help him. I love not those popish mummeries of extreme unction and communion of the sick within the doors of my house. To shrive an unconscious man is the veriest travesty of God's dealings. It is an abomination in my sight!"

"I love not the mummeries of Rome," answered

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Lionel thoughtfully; "and yet I would not lightly speak ill of those who have been reared up in the belief in them. Neither dare I say that there be no efficacy in the Blessed Sacrament, even when ministered with rites that savour rather of man than of God; for has not the Lord said of it that to the faithful He will make it His Body and His Blood?"

"Ay, verily," spoke Lionel's father, in tones of grave decision; "and the Lord has bidden all His children to eat and drink, and the Church of Rome denies to them the cup—denies to them the half of the Sacrament, of which every son of the Church has a right to partake; nay, more than a right, a divinely-given command. Deep are the mysteries of God's Sacraments; dimly only can we see their action upon sinful man; yet all that is given us of God is given for a purpose. And much will the Church have to answer for in denying to her children the Cup of Salvation. But this is not the place to discuss such points. We have here before us a dying man, a son of the Roman Church; and, good friend, I think, with my son, that we should summon to his side a priest of his own faith, to help him through the dark passage."

"Would he in like case give us one of our ministers, were we dying in captivity amongst those of his faith?" asked old Van der Hammer, with some not unnatural bitterness.

"That is scarce the way to look at it," returned the other gravely. "We are bidden to love our enemies; to do good to them that persecute us; to do unto others as

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we would that they should do unto us. Wherefore, son Lionel, I think it well that thou shouldest go forth and tell Father Andrew all, and bid him come hither if he will; though he is a stanch patriot, and may not relish the mission, despite his priestly calling. But lest he may not come, or may not come in time, I will myself offer up a prayer for the soul that seems about to take its flight; for we never know where the power of prayer begins or ends, and it may help him, even though we know not if it can reach his understanding or touch his heart. That we must leave to God."

Lionel went quietly from the room, but the other two remained beside his bed, and Alphonso knew that they both knelt. Like one in a trance, who knows everything that passes about him without being able to give a sign of life, the young man listened to the strange words which rose and filled the room. Strange indeed to him, for he had never heard their like before; yet they were only words of an earnest and heartfelt prayer, offered for one who seemed about to pass away from this world in the first blush of his manhood's prime. It prayed forgiveness for all his sins, known and unknown; prayed for light to the departing soul—that it might have grace to look to the Redeemer alone, and to trust in His Blood for salvation rather than to any rite of man. There was a simple eloquence in the words that was inexpressibly striking at such a moment, and Alphonso felt his own heart going out in that prayer, even though he knew it to be offered by a heretic, and to contain the germ of doctrines which

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his priest would bid him shun as emanations direct from the devil. Yet even this consciousness did not alarm Alphonso now. He was glad to think that a priest had been sent for—was glad that if he were about to die, as these people plainly thought, he should not die without the last rites of his Church. But, nevertheless, he felt a great peace sink down upon his soul as these words of prayer arose in the quiet room. He made a great effort, and clasped his hands together, as if to try to join in them; then, even this effort being almost more than he had strength to make, he passed almost at once into a deep unconsciousness.

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CHAPTER VIII.

LIFE IN THE CITY.

"VICTORY, victory! Hurrah for the brave Teligny! Hurrah for the 'Young Bachelors!' Mondragon has been worsted at Fort Lillo! He and his soldiers have taken themselves back to their own quarters! Hurrah for Antwerp! Hurrah for the cause of liberty! The great Prince of Parma is about to find that he is not invincible yet!"

Malcolm and Maurice came headlong up the stairs and into the long living-room with these joyful words on their lips. Harold and Lionel started up; the women lifted their heads eagerly; the old people did the same. They were all gathered round the stove, which had been lighted for the first time that September evening, albeit only a faint glow diffused itself into the room; for fuel was like to be scarce and dear, and care was being exercised in all matters of domestic expenditure. But few in Antwerp seriously believed that the projected bridge could ever become a reality, and there was no danger of actual destitution whilst the bold Zeeland skippers continued to ply their hazardous trade.

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"What has happened? Whence comes this news?" asked Lionel quickly, as the two youths, flushed with excitement, burst into the room. "Methought I heard something of a tumult in the streets below. Have good tidings been brought into the city?"

"Ay, the best. Mondragon has been forced to quit his position before Lillo. Brave Teligny has worsted him at every point. But we shall hear all anon. Joris and Otto are within the city. They have brought news and despatches to the Burgomaster, and are doubtless with him now. We saw and got speech with them for a few brief moments, and they will be here ere long. But there is no mistaking; it is no false report that has reached us. Lillo is safe; and doubtless the Prince of Parma is gnawing his nails with vexation that he has been foiled!"

As the quick sound of comment, question, and response arose in the large family assembly, Maud stole a timid glance at a long, recumbent figure, extended upon a couch in a recess that was almost like a tiny inner chamber. She saw that the owner of the figure was fully alive to all that was passing in the room. His eyes were open, and his head slightly turned towards the speakers, though for the moment (save by Maud) his presence there had been completely forgotten.

For Alphonso had not died, even though given up by all who saw him at the crisis of his illness. His fine constitution had enabled him to battle against the heavy odds, and rally when those about him thought he must sink. He was now struggling back to tardy convalescence,

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weak and feeble as a child, often prostrated even now by attacks of acute pain, and feeling sometimes as though it was a pity he had not been allowed to slip out of life when death was so near. It seemed almost impossible that he would ever be a sound or a strong man again, and his spirit often chafed against the weakness of the flesh. But still he was making progress day by day, and he was now able to dress himself in the clothes provided for him by his kind captors, and creep down the stairs to the couch in the living-room, which he had been made welcome to use. He had somehow contrived to win the interest and almost the affection of the whole party. The women pitied him for his sufferings, and admired his courage, patience, and fortitude. The men recognized in him the kindred soldier spirit, and felt those generous stirrings which always follow a kindly act done to one who ranks in the eyes of the world as a foe. They made him welcome to come and go at will amongst them, so soon as he was able to leave his bed and drag his limbs from one spot to another. This was the third day on which he had found himself an interested and curious observer of the family life which went on in that double house, and the family had become so far used to his presence amongst them that they forgot sometimes they had a stranger in their midst.

As for Diego, he still lay in the room above, conscious now, and sullen and silent, unable to rise from his bed on account of his broken limbs, but not at all disposed to show any of the gratitude towards his protectors that Alphonso

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exhibited. He seldom spoke if he could avoid doing so. He would lie with a scowl on his face if any one came near him, and accept what was given him in sullen silence. He was no favourite with those who tended him as a matter of Christian charity. The girls were afraid of his black looks; the young men could not forget that he was one of the hated Spanish race. The elder generation could make nothing of him, and marvelled at the difference betwixt him and his comrade.

"I hear the brothers coming!" cried Coosje, suddenly springing to her feet and making a rush for the door. "Those are the footsteps of Otto and Joris. I know it, I know it!" And she darted down the staircase before she had finished speaking, and was quickly heard returning, her light steps followed by the heavier martial tread of the two stalwart brothers, who had been so many weeks absent from their home.

Otto and Joris came in looking proud and happy, and went up to the elders of the party to receive their salutation and blessing before allowing themselves to be surrounded and eagerly embraced by the brothers and sisters. It was some time before the tumult had subsided sufficiently to enable them to answer the questions heaped upon them, or to tell their tale; but when silence had been restored at last, they were ready enough to do this.

"It has been a hot time for us within the fort," said Otto, laughing. "Yon old veteran Mondragon seems to sleep neither by day nor night, and it was one long cannonade against our solid walls—Liefkenshoek (which some of us

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have vowed to win back to Antwerp) taking part against us from the opposite side of the river. But our walls are strong, and we suffered little damage from the batteries that had been erected against us, although much harassed by the pertinacity of the enemy. Our brave Teligny was resolved to hold Lillo at all cost, and he had a shrewd suspicion that the enemy's losses were considerably heavier than ours. At the same time they kept their station before us, and ceased not to fire upon us from their batteries. After some weeks of this we felt it time to make a decided stroke, and if possible drive them altogether away. A council was held among our leaders, and then we heard what had been planned."

"O Otto, what was that?" asked the breathless Coosje.

"Why, nothing more nor less than a great sortie from the fort, which our brave commander was to lead in person. We were to attack the foe at close quarters, but not to fight too fiercely, reserving ourselves for the final stratagem."

"Stratagem! what stratagem?" asked Lionel quickly.

"Why, that you shall quickly hear," said Joris, taking up the tale as his brother paused to quench his thirst in the great flagon of home-brewed ale that Roosje had brought for the refreshment of their soldiers. "We sallied forth, as had been settled, and fell upon the Spaniards with a right good-will, as you may guess. But they received us with a warm welcome, and fought as bravely as is their wont. There was some loss on both sides; but, as Otto has said, we had other ends in view than that of routing

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them. We kept them hotly engaged until a certain hour had arrived, by which time we knew that the river was at its highest point; and you know that this week is one of unwontedly high tides. Then at a given signal we commenced to give back, and retire, still fighting, to the fort. The enemy, thinking we were in retreat, pursued us with shouts, and strove to throw us into disorder, coming on fiercely and fast, and being so close behind us that by the time we had reached the first rampart they were almost on our heels. But though so near they came no further; for at that moment the great sluice-gate was opened, and out poured tons upon tons of water—a great flood let loose upon them, which swept them away by tens and hundreds, and drove them before it as we had never been able to drive them. Our guns opened fire at the same moment, and betwixt fire and water our foes seemed to feel that they had had enough of Dutch cheer. The brave fellows deserve praise for their gallantry and their resolution; for they would not leave their field-pieces behind them, but carried them off in their arms, though struggling breast-high often in the foaming water, and seeing numbers of their comrades shot down or swept away. We will give them credit for being what they are—brave devils of soldiers, though devils in very truth when they have the chance.—And now, brother, I pray you pass me the tankard, for I am as thirsty as thou."

"And do you return to Lillo?" asked the mother, who was hovering round her two sons, as mothers will do when they have them safe back after times of peril and uncertainty.

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"That we scarce know ourselves. For the present the peril to Lillo is past. The Prince has commanded the assault to be abandoned, and it may be there will be more need of us elsewhere. It is said that he is still full of plans for closing the river with his bridge, and that already he has driven in innumerable great piles on either side as the commencement of the undertaking. Some mock at the thought, and others begin to tremble. Have you in the city heard aught of piercing the Saftingen Dike, on the other side of the river, since the Kowenstyn has been lost to us? Rumour says that that is the next step to be taken to thwart the Prince, but others say it will do more harm than good."

All looked at Lionel, who was best instructed in what went on in the city counsels, and he answered readily,—

"The question is often brought before the Council, but so far it has not been wholly decided. Men remember that the Prince of Orange, when that alternative was submitted to him, declared that it would be hurtful rather than advantageous to Antwerp, although some of us cannot see why. I myself am against it, for my trust in our dead leader is great. But it is like enough it will be done, if the fear of the bridge-building becomes much greater than it is at present. I wish that was the only point under discussion at our wretched city boards. But there be times when I think that the demon of mischief must be abroad in our midst, so full of folly and blind arrogance do our rulers seem. There are days when I think they must surely be mad."

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"What are they saying now?" asked Roosje anxiously; and all looked to Lionel for information.

"I have heard a whisper once or twice before, but to-day it was actually mooted in the Council. It seems that the citizens are complaining of the price charged by the Zeeland skippers for the provisions brought into the town, and that some of them have asked the Schepens to relieve them of the heavy charges."

"But how can that be done?" asked the old Van der Hammer. "These men come to us at the risk of their lives, and as we know, they are like to be most foully and cruelly handled if they have the ill-luck to fall into the hands of the enemy. With Parma's forts all along the river, as they now are, it is no light matter to run boats into the city. We cannot look that they should take such dire risk without compensating reward. What do the people desire of the Schepens? They are not forced to buy if the price be too great. If they prefer to go short of food rather than part from their gold, that is their own affair."

"Well, that is how the right-minded citizens feel. They know that in times like these food must be dear, and that we cannot look for it to be otherwise; but our magistrates are seriously debating whether or not to interfere on behalf of the citizens. They talk of fixing a maximum rate upon grain and other commodities, and forcing the Zeelanders to accept what they have fixed as the tariff. Whether or no so mad a thing will be done I cannot say, but it is already talked of in the city, and greatly approved by many. Why they fail to see what the result will be I cannot

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guess; but their eyes seem blinded, whilst their hearts are puffed up, and they think to rule the world, when they know not how to rule their own city."

"O husband," exclaimed Roosje anxiously, "I trust nothing will be done to hinder the regular victualling of the city! What mean you by your words? What is like to happen if our magistrates do this thing?"

"Happen! why, that is easy to tell. The traffic will simply cease. No man will risk his life to bring provisions into this city if he receive no compensating price. Why men cannot see this themselves I marvel. But when I speak with the grumblers, they declare that the skippers are greedy blood-suckers, and that they deserve to have their exorbitant prices cut down. They forget that it is our necessity, not their greed, which makes the prices high; and that if we drive these bold mariners away from our ports through our parsimony, it is we who will suffer, not they. As I say, it seems as though men could not or would not see what is going on around them. God be merciful to this poor city, for she has no mercy on herself!"

The faces of the women were anxious and troubled. It was a serious thing for them to contemplate the cessation of supplies. Roosje had long been making her preparations, and her cellar was well stored with grain and salted beef, hams, sides of bacon, biscuit of various sorts, cheese, dried fruits, and almost every sort of provision that would stand being kept for months together. At the same time, in that large household the consumption of food was very

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considerable; and even though supplies had to be bought at four or five times the ordinary price, the prospect of a falling off gave rise to great anxiety. Money had always been plentiful in that house; for trade still flourished in these perilous times, and Antwerp could yet boast its wealthy merchants. But if food ceased to be bought for money, how then could the city be fed? It was almost impossible to contemplate the commission of such a gigantic blunder, and yet within a month the fiat had gone forth. The indignant skippers found on reaching the city at peril of their lives that they were to be paid only at the rate fixed by the magistrates for their wares. They went forth again breathing curses upon the parsimony of the menaced city, and the trade ceased without a struggle through the inconceivable folly of the citizens. Antwerp was left but half victualled at the commencement of the long, inclement winter, and that not by the blockade of the enemy, but by the suicidal policy of her own governors.

But to-night and for many days following there was nothing but triumph in the hearts of the citizens.

"We have triumphed at Lillo; we shall triumph again!" was the cry on all sides; and now they began seriously to talk of piercing the Saftingen Dike, believing, in spite of all warnings to the contrary, that there would be safety for the city in that measure. It was, perhaps, not wonderful that in the minds of the ignorant citizens it should seem as good a measure as the piercing of the Blaw-garen and Kowenstyn would have been; but they should have recollected that they were ignorant of engineering, and of

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many matters which it behoved them to know before they were capable of giving an opinion on such a vital point. It should have been enough for them that the great Prince of Orange had maintained, and in part demonstrated, that to cut the Saftingen Dike would not answer the purpose, and would probably be detrimental to the country. No man now living knew as well as he had done what was the most sagacious and far-seeing policy to be adopted. Ignoring his counsel, resolved to effect a great master-stroke and retrieve some of those blunders of which they were beginning to be vaguely aware, the Board of Schepens, in defiance of the advice of the Burgomaster (though that advice was not altogether heartily given, Sainte Aldegonde himself being half won over to think the measure a good one), gave orders for the cutting of the Saftingen Dike and the opening of the sluices. The thing was done, and a large tract of country submerged; but soon it appeared that this expanse of water was of no use to the city. It was well guarded by Parma's forts. It did not reach the city walls. But it did give to the great Spanish general an independent water-way by which he could transport his materials for the construction of the bridge from Ghent to Kalloo without passing near to the walls of Antwerp, as otherwise his ships would have had to do. He had a fleet of thirty vessels all laded, ready to come at some propitious moment. The cutting of the Saftingen Dike could not have been better planned for him. Scarcely had the news been brought to the city that the thing had been done, before they heard, to their dismay and

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chagrin, that Parma's fleet was on its way to Kalloo without approaching Antwerp at all.

"Great heavens! what will your citizens do next?" cried Gianibelli with grim scorn, as Malcolm dashed in, flushed and hot, with the news. "You fools—you fools of Dutchmen! Said I not well when I told you that the whole Board of Schepens had scarce the brain of a hen amongst them? Mark my word, the bridge will be built! that bridge will assuredly be built. Nevertheless, unless Antwerp shows again that she is peopled with fools, I will destroy it, be it never so strong and so secure!"

But all Antwerp was in a tumult, and there was no staying to talk quietly. Veronica could scarce get her lover to remain to explain what was about to be done.

"The fleet is coming down!" he cried excitedly. "If it reach Kalloo, we are indeed undone. It must be stopped ere it reaches the camp. Our Burgomaster is going forth, and half the soldiers of the city with him. The ships are being prepared, and the Admiral is to take command. A message has been sent to the Zeelanders hovering about in the mouth of the river to join with us, and we must at all hazard stop this convoy to Kalloo. They say our Burgomaster is roused at last to a greater anger against the enemy without and the folly of the citizens within than ever before. I trust this may be a lesson which we shall take to heart, and which may preserve us from further danger."

The youth was gone almost ere the words were out of his mouth. The streets were alive with excited citizens, all talking and vituperating and exclaiming together. Men

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looked stern and angry, women pale and frightened. It was bringing the peril home to them when they knew that unless this convoy could be stopped, and some of the forts on the Flanders side of the river taken, the Prince of Parma could be supplied with materials and provisions from Ghent by this new water-way, and need never run the gauntlet of the hostile city at all. Ah! why had not they thought of this before? Why had they not trusted to the sagacity of that dead statesman whose judgment had never yet played them false?

In Hooch Straet the excitement was great; for Lionel and his band were to turn out to man some of the vessels under Admiral Jacob Jacobzoon, and every one of the young men, even down to the lad Philip, had gone forth to strive to bring victory to the city. The two old men had gone out to seek for news, and to take counsel with their brother merchants as to what might be done to save the ill-governed city from the mad follies she was constantly committing; and none remained within doors save the pale-faced women and their two Spanish prisoners, who yet remained as hostages in their house.

"You, Señor, must rejoice when we are in trouble," said Roosje, a little bitterly, as she turned from the window whence she had been watching the march forth of her husband and his band, and found herself face to face with Alphonso, who was likewise watching with an expression of interest the crowd below, all talking and gesticulating in excitement and anger. "I trow the knowledge of our misfortunes is as medicine to your heart."

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The young Spaniard's face was thoughtful and his voice gentle as he made answer,—

"I scarce know my own heart in moments like these, Mevrouw Roosje. It would be but scant loyalty on my part to lament at the good fortune of my sovereign and his generals, and yet I have received so much of kindness in this stranger city that I cannot desire ill to her. Least of all can I wish that trouble should fall upon a house in which I have known so much of Christian charity."

Roosje's face cleared a little; she did not long cherish ill-will.

"I crave your pardon for my hasty words, Señor," she said. "I would not have spoken them had I paused to think. But my heart cannot but be heavy within me; and in moments like these one is apt to forget that a foe can also be a friend."

"I thank you for that gracious word, lady," answered Alphonso, with a slight bow. "And if fate should enable me to show myself worthy of it in days to come, I trust you may live to find it no empty name."

Roosje went away a little comforted. Sometimes she had considerable satisfaction in feeling that they had these two noble Spanish youths (for they knew by this time that both came from noble families) beneath their roof. Always haunted by the fear that her husband, or one of her brothers or his, should fall into the enemy's hand, it was a great relief to feel that, were this to be the case, an exchange might be effected by means of Alphonso or Diego. This reason alone would have made her glad to keep the

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two prisoners with them; and as things now were, there had been no talk of moving them. No official notice of their capture had been given. They were looked upon as private captives. Diego was still unable to leave his bed, owing to the fracture of the thigh, which was long in healing; whilst Alphonso, who was still very weak and shadowy, had so won his way into the hearts of those about him that they had no wish to be rid of his company.

He and the young men were on excellent terms. They had that love of fighting and adventure which is a great link in common. Alphonso could tell stories of his own camp life and past experiences which were of wonderful interest to them; and he soon ceased to seem like an enemy, although he would not always remain in the room when his Monarch was being vituperated and the practices of his Church held up to opprobrium and ridicule. But when Lionel or the elder Wilford was present this never happened. Both of them had a certain chivalrous regard for the feelings of their prisoner-guest which he was quick to mark and appreciate. Also they both held views something different from those of Van der Hammer and his children; and when there was contemptuous language passing about the malpractices of the Church, they would interpose often to point out the error of the use of the word "church," and maintain with some eloquence and force that the errors were of man's device, whilst the Church, in the proper use of the word, was the Body of Christ, and must not be spoken of as though it were a creation of man. To all of which talk Alphonso would listen with bated breath and

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eager attention, longing to understand more of what was in the minds of these men, yet half afraid to ask lest he should be committing a deadly sin.

For he had had the ministrations of a priest when lying at death's door, and the Father still continued to visit him and Diego, and was constantly warning him against allowing himself to talk with those who held heretical doctrine; although the worthy priest held the characters of these men in high esteem, and was on very friendly terms with all. Then here in this city of Antwerp, surrounded by men of fiercely heretical views (for there were many friends and acquaintances coming and going to that hospitable house, and Alphonso in his dim corner heard and saw much that passed), he realized that there was plenty of the persecuting spirit, which he in his secret heart condemned, to be found in the holders of the reformed doctrines. True, they did not seek to convert the world to their way of thinking by anguish of body, nor did they openly advocate death as a means of ridding themselves of those who did not think with them; but they showed that they could be very intolerant of any open profession of the ancient religion, and he knew that there were many in the city who would fain have enforced, even at the sword's point, the edict which had been made some years before, prohibiting the forms of Roman Catholic worship in any of the churches in the city. Alphonso felt that it would not be difficult for this intolerance to thrive and grow till it became almost as strong in the one party as it had been in the other. The very men who so courageously advo-

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cated their own right to think for themselves and judge for themselves, were almost ready even now to turn upon their rivals and deny to them this same right of individual liberty of thought. True, the more enlightened spirits protested, and it was well known that the Prince of Orange had been a strenuous opposer of religious persecution in any form; but Alphonso was learning in this Protestant town that human nature and human failings were much the same in all classes and all creeds. He discovered that it was not the absence of the persecuting spirit which made the radical difference between Protestant and Romanist; it was something deeper than that, and so far he had not made out what it was. Sometimes he was strangely attracted, and at others almost equally repelled, by what he saw and heard of the faith his royal master had resolved to stamp out in these countries. But at least the desire for a better understanding had not died within him, and he often wished that he could summon up resolution to unfold some of his doubts and difficulties either to Lionel Wilford or to his father. But the reserve of the English nation seemed always to wrap them round, and so far he had not conquered his own scruples of obedience sufficiently to break the ice of silence which surrounded the subject.

Certainly to-day was not the time to broach it. It was a day of anxious waiting in the city. Scouts were out in boats all over the flooded country, and every half-hour some fresh rumour would set the whole town in a ferment. Great was the confidence of the citizens in Sainte Aldegonde, whose exploits in the field had been so many and so

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brilliant, and ready were they to prophesy victory for him and his barge, the *Flying Devil*, said to be the best and swiftest ever built.

"We ought to have news soon," Roosje kept saying anxiously as the day wore away and darkness began to come on. "I would we could hear some intelligence we could rely upon. It is weary waiting when we have so many dear ones in peril."

They were not to be kept much longer in anxiety. Sounds of violent execration began to be heard in the streets, and the women turned pale at the sound, for it was not the cry of victory that was in that note.

"Some ill has befallen the expedition!" cried Coosje, starting up and darting out upon the balcony; and from thence she heard angry cries, and the name of Admiral Jacobzoon seemed in all mouths, shouted with every inflection of scorn and fury.

"Something dreadful has happened! We have had a reverse!" spoke one and another in the room; and before long all was known. The fleet from Ghent had triumphantly reached Parma at Kalloo, and the attempt to intercept it had proved utterly abortive. Perhaps through the haste in which they had been sent for, possibly from some suicidal indifference, the Zeeland boats had failed to co-operate with those from Antwerp, and Admiral Jacobzoon, finding himself not backed as he had expected, had turned tail almost without striking a blow, and had ordered a retreat. Great excitement had followed that order, and there had been something almost like mutiny on board,

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the soldiers vowing they would throw overboard the sailors if they did not drive their vessels towards the enemy in the wake of the barge which carried their Burgomaster. But panic had seized the sailors, and they were stubborn, and would do nothing. The confusion was great, and nothing could be effected. Everything went wrong, and what added to the terror of the moment was that the Burgomaster's barge was so hotly pursued by the enemy (for Sainte Aldegonde was leading the van, and would not be deterred by the cowardice of his Admiral) that he ran a narrow escape of falling into their hands. Had not his boat been so swift and so well managed, Antwerp would have sustained a fearful loss that day; as it was, she had received a sufficiently alarming blow. She had proved utterly inferior to the enemy on the waters of her own river, and her Admiral had shown himself an arrant coward.

"Koppen gaet loppen" was the name by which he was in future known in the streets and alleys of Antwerp; and "Runaway Jacob" did not care to show his face abroad for some while to come. The whole business of the Saftingen Dike had been a gigantic blunder; and Antwerp was stirred to deep irritation, though even then scarce realizing how much of this misfortune was due to her citizens' own turbulent spirit, disunion, and resolve to govern themselves rather than be governed by the wise heads of rulers.

The voice of the people was always the voice that prevailed within those walls; with what result will be presently seen.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE DAWN OF LOVE.

"SWEET Mistress Maud, do not grieve so bitterly. It goes to my heart to see such grief. Would that I could comfort you somewhat!"

Maud started at the sound of these words, and hastily took her hands from her face. A blush mantled her cheek.

"I knew not that you were there, Señor," she said, half rising from her spinning; for she was sitting at her wheel although she had ceased to ply the distaff in order to wipe away the tears that were coursing down her cheeks. Her face was pale, and her garb spoke of recent loss in the family circle. She was alone in the great room, which looked chill and desolate this bleak November day, save for the presence of their prisoner-guest Alphonso, who had slowly advanced from the recess, and was now standing looking down at her troubled face with a great compassion in his soft dark eyes. He was himself still very thin and gaunt, and there were deep lines round his eyes and mouth which had not been there till within the last few months. His movements were rather slow, and it was plain he still felt the effects of the rough handling he had received that

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August night. But the life within this comfortable home had been all in his favour, and he was slowly mending; though he was perfectly well aware that had he been subjected to the hardships of a soldier's life, he must inevitably have succumbed to his injuries.

His gratitude towards those who had been his friends in need was very sincere and deep; and in especial manner was he drawn towards Maud, who had from the first taken somewhat upon herself the task of seeing to his comfort, and striving to lighten the weary burden of suffering and languor which had been his to bear.

Therefore when he saw her in tears, and knew how heavy-hearted she was, it seemed to him that it was but right and natural to seek if possible to comfort her, could any sympathy of his serve to lighten her load.

"Sweet Mistress Maud, do not go. You are not afraid of me after all your goodness to me in the past? I would I could do for you one tithe of what you have many times done for me. But men lack so greatly those graces which belong to gentle womanhood. And yet, sweet lady, methinks I could point out a way of comfort, if you would but listen."

Maud seemed ready enough to listen to this gentle pleading; she had resumed her seat, and no more tears had fallen since Alphonso commenced to speak. She slowly turned her wheel, for to sit with folded hands was a thing almost unknown in this busy household; but her thoughts were not with her task, and her eyes sought the handsome face of the young Spaniard

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"To lose such a mother and a brother so full of promise must indeed be a source of sorrow," said Alphonso, softly and gently. "But, dear lady, if you would but carry your sorrow to the Holy Virgin, and beg her sweet prayers on their behalf with her Blessed Son, I trow that half the sting of sorrow would be gone. She is so full of love and compassion. She is ever ready to listen to the story of our sorrows and sufferings. She knew so much of bitter sorrow herself, that her gracious heart is ever open to the needs of others. 'Our Lady of Sorrows,' as we call her sometimes. Ah, if you would but go to her and beg her intercession, half the sorrow and the pain would fly!"

Maud lifted her eyes to the earnest face of the young soldier, and a sudden and beautiful smile irradiated her own.

"O Señor," she answered earnestly, "we do not need to go to the Holy Virgin with our petitions, for it is Jesus Christ Himself who liveth to make intercession for us before His Father's throne. We who have God's Holy Word as a lamp to our path and a light unto our steps know well that there is but one Mediator between God and man, even the Man Christ Jesus. And our dear Saviour was Himself a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief; we know that now He is a High Priest who is touched with compassion for our infirmities, seeing that in His own flesh He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. Ah! it is better to go to Him than to any other; and though with all generations we call the Holy Virgin blessed amongst women, we may not address our prayers to her,

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because she is not God; and we have His own word that prayer may only be offered to Him."

Alphonso looked earnestly into the girl's fair face, which was shining with the purity of her faith, and a great compassion was in his eyes, not unmingled with a little perplexity.

"Lady," he said gently, "I know that you speak from the heart, and I grant that there is a beauty in the words you speak and the thoughts you thus express; but believe me, there is peril in throwing aside the teachings of the Church and in striving to be wiser than our mother. We know that our Blessed Lord Himself intrusted the mysteries of His Holy Catholic Church to His Apostles, that they should minister the same to all believers in all generations, as faithful and wise stewards. And the Church in all ages has taught us that the Blessed Virgin has been raised to the highest heavens, that she may intercede there with her Son for us poor frail and erring creatures. And oh, sweet lady, if you could but see what a beautiful thought it is that we may always go to her with our woes and our sorrows; that she is ever inclining her compassionate heart towards us, and interceding with her Holy Son for poor erring mortals! And not for us mortals on the earth alone, but for those who have passed beyond the grave and are expiating their carnal sins in the fires of purgatory. Ah! think, lady, what it must be for them to know that their names are being brought to the Holy Mother of God, and that she is spreading out her hands to her Son, and interceding with Him for them! Ah! how

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can you refuse them this boon? How can you be content only to shed tears for them, when you might have the Queen of Heaven bespeaking mercy for them? If you could but see as I see, ah, how the sting would be taken from your sorrow!"

He was so much in earnest that the girl felt a quick thrill of happiness in the thought of his loving sympathy; but the expression on her face did not change. There was no wavering in her glance; and when he had ceased speaking she took up her word again, for Maud was not ill-instructed in those points of doctrine upon which the whole fate of her country seemed to hang. She had heard them discussed too often in her hearing not to be well versed in the tenets of her faith. And moreover it was with her no mere matter of dry doctrine. To her they were very living truths, and she would have laid down her life in the cause in which she had been reared, and had often contemplated the possibility of facing martyrdom for conscience' sake. Had not her parents known hundreds of good men and women who had gone to their death within the last twenty years? And if Antwerp fell there was small security for any heretic who might be found within her walls, even though men said that the Prince of Parma had no wish to be needlessly severe with the recalcitrant Netherlanders, or to serve a vanquished city as his predecessor had done.

"Ah, Señor," she answered, with a happy smile, "it is you who do not understand; it is you, methinks, who are to be pitied for the fashion in which you are taught to

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think of your dead. You hold that they are being tormented in the fires of purgatory; but we know that they are resting in the peace of God until the day of the Resurrection, and that we need not pray for them, because they are at peace with Him, and that none can pluck them from His hand. It is not for them we weep. We know that for them to depart and be with Christ is far better. But we feel the blank their presence leaves behind, and for ourselves we weep. Yet, methinks, had we more faith we should scarce do even that; for we should think of their gain rather than our loss, and be content. It is you who should weep for your dead, not we—you who hold that they are being tormented in fire. Oh, to us that is a fearful thought! I know not how I could bear it."

"Nay; but, lady, listen. It is not the fire of hell—that indeed would be fearful; it is but those blessed purgatorial fires which purge away our earthly dross, and in which the spirit expiates those sins committed here on earth, before it is fit for the heavenly mansions above. How could any erring, sin-stained soul pass straight from the wickedness of this world into the awful holiness that surrounds the Throne of God?"

"Ah, Señor," answered Maud quickly, "how might any erring soul dare to contemplate that approach into the Holy Presence, save in the power of the one and only expiation which ever could have been made for the sins of mankind? It is not, believe me, the fires of purgatory that can cleanse the soul of man, but that holy fire which descended from heaven after our Lord's Ascension, and has

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ever since abided in His Church—the fire of the Holy Ghost, who alone can sanctify and purify each human heart. Señor, believe me, there is no expiation of sin in purgatorial fire. Christ on the Cross made the one only expiation—the one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world; and to teach that the sufferings of human souls help on in that work is to deny that He and He alone is the Saviour of mankind, and that His work was perfect and complete. To us that doctrine is as fearful a heresy as any of which we stand accused by your priests."

Alphonso looked very much taken aback; and yet he did see the point she had made out against him, for he was an ardent believer in the Sacrifice of the Cross, although his mind had not been taught to go further than the Cross, or to look upon a Risen and Ascended Lord in the Heavens. The thought of the Saviour was inextricably bound up in his mind with the emblems of His Passion—the cross, the nails, and the crown of thorns.

He had often of late been present when the Bible was read aloud in this family circle. At first he had abstained from these readings as a matter of conscience; but latterly curiosity and perhaps a nobler feeling had got the better of his sense of reluctance, and he had remained, and had listened earnestly to all that was read and spoken. He could not deny that if indeed these were the words of Scripture as revealed by God, then indeed these people had some show of reason on their side; for the words, if correctly rendered, could certainly bear an interpretation

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not put upon them by his faction in the Church, which he looked upon as the Church itself. At the same time, he always bore in mind the warning he had received from the priest who visited him from time to time, that these heretical Bibles were not true renderings of the original, but had been moulded to meet the views of those who wished to make a schism from the true Church of Christ. He also felt grave doubts whether in any case the Scriptures were meant to be given into the keeping of any person who might choose to obtain a copy, to be read and interpreted in any fashion that seemed good to him. He regarded them rather as the property of the Church, to be guarded and preserved by her, and dispensed to her children in what form she thought best. It was, indeed, this argument that was the mainstay of many men of enlightened understandings, who felt that they could not answer the arguments of their opponents when they came armed with the words of Scripture in their defence; and Alphonso fell back upon what was to him an invincible rampart.

"But, lady, although your words sound good, they are not the words of our Holy Church. We have her authority for maintaining that the souls of the departed have to pass into the fires of purgatory, and that it is the Holy Virgin whose intercession is needed by them, to help them through their trial. Are we to set up our private judgment against the teaching of the Church? I trow not. The Church is of God; it is the Body of which He is the Head. If we will not believe its teaching, we separate ourselves from the Body—we become outcasts and heretics.

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Ah, sweet lady, if I could but lead you back into the fold, and bring you into the safe shelter of the Church of God!"

There was that in his eyes which brought a soft blush into Maud's face. Both felt that in this conversation, more open and confidential than any which had taken place between them before, they were drawing very near in sympathy, although in opinion widely different. Both felt that the salvation of the other had become very sacred to each; both felt a very strong desire to draw the other into a true understanding of the faith. Maud answered this appeal by a quick glance, which sent a thrill of happiness through his frame, and her answer was very gently spoken.

"Indeed, Señor, I thank you for your good-will; yet I cannot echo your wish, for I am already a daughter of the Church of Christ, and no anathema from any Bishop of Rome could change my standing there. I was baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost; and we know that there is but one baptism in the sight of God, and that all who are thus baptized are made members of the Body of Christ."

Alphonso did not know anything of the kind. He was no theologian, although a devout son of the Church, and his impression was that heretical baptism was no baptism at all. Yet how could he look into Maud's pure face and believe her altogether reprobate and outcast?

"Indeed, sweet mistress, I would fain believe that you did indeed belong to the Church."

"I do," she answered firmly; "and believe me, Señor, had you heard and learned as much as I have done about

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the Church, you would think and feel as I do. You tell me ever and again, when other argument fails you, that the Church teaches what you have been taught to believe, and what we believe not. But what does that mean? It means that the Roman Catholic Church of to-day and of the past few hundred years teaches it. But if you go further back still, you will not find that the Church taught it in the days of the Apostles and their successors. Where do we hear of them pleading with the Virgin Mary, or teaching men that she stands as intercessor before God, almost to the exclusion of His Son, who has expressly been called the 'One Mediator' between God and man? Where do we hear them tell of purgatorial fires, of masses for the dead, of indulgences for sin that may be bought with money? Believe me, Señor, these things have been added by man, not given by God; and thus have idolatry and will-worship stolen into His Church, which should have kept the faith pure as it was received from the Apostles who set it in order in the first days. If I could but show to you the light as I see it, how happy it would make me! It seems to me a dreadful thing to have been brought up to put any creature, however pure and good, in the place of the Creator; a terrible thing to feel that our Blessed Saviour needs that any should come between ourselves and Him. If when on earth He took up the little children in His arms and blessed them, and never turned a deaf ear to the cry of the suffering and the repentant, how shall He not hear us also when He has received His glory in the heavens? Ah, Señor, if you only knew what it was to go straight

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to Jesus with every care and every sorrow, you would not talk any longer of the Blessed Virgin; you would know that your Saviour needed not that any should plead with Him for you—that you can plead with Him face to face yourself!"

Alphonso was silent. He felt that against such faith (or such delusion) as this his arguments were powerless. He began to have a vague misgiving that these things might indeed be true. He would not admit as much to himself as yet—the bare thought was a terror. But none the less was he conscious of a certain wavering in his own mind, and he had to fortify himself by recalling the outrages of the Iconoclasts and the fanatical fury of some of the Protestant sects before he could comfortably assure himself of his own loyalty to his faith. He would not bring these subjects forward with Maud to-day. He did not wish to trouble her with controversy now in the hour of her sorrow. He would rather have led the talk into more personal channels; for there was something strangely fascinating to him in the companionship of this fair-faced girl with the gentle voice and pure expression. Had she not been a heretic, and had she been of his own station in life, he would have wished nothing better than to win her for his wife. As it was, the religious difference seemed to make an invincible barrier, and he had not gone so far as to wonder whether, that being overcome, his pride would allow him to mate with a burgher maiden of Antwerp, and take her home to mingle with high-born maids and matrons from the noble families of Spain.

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There was as yet nothing definite in the sweet thoughts which floated through the young man's brain and sometimes set his imagination on fire. He knew that his day was bright or dark according as he had seen much or little of Maud. He knew that it gave him the keenest pleasure to note that she took him in a measure under her protection, and that she would have thought to spare for him when all else were occupied with their own affairs. And indeed there had been much in Hooch Straet to engross the time and thought of the dwellers in the double house; and sorrow had fallen upon them of a personal kind, in addition to the darkness of the political horizon.

For death had made his entrance into that house, and had taken away two of its members. The lad Philip had returned from the attempt to intercept and capture the Ghent fleet with a wound in the forearm and hand of which nobody had seriously thought, until sudden symptoms of gangrene set in, and the youth succumbed within three days. His mother had watched over him night and day till he died, and then she had taken to her bed and quietly passed away before her family were aware that she was seriously indisposed. It was a fearful blow to all. True, they had been warned before that all she had gone through during these long years of uncertainty and peril had undermined her health, and that her heart might at any time suddenly cease to beat; but days and weeks and years had rolled on, and still she went about amongst them as before, and until she absolutely lay dead before their eyes they could not believe that she had gone.

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The blow to her husband was terrible, and changed him into an old man at once. A strange craving for his native land seized upon him. He was so restless at home that they knew not how to keep him within doors, and were afraid he would come to some harm in the tumultuous city, where discontent and mutiny were rife. It was then that Harold made a proposition to the rest of the family—a proposition which eventually was carried out with considerable speed.

Harold had frequently been to England in the way of business, with one or another of the merchant vessels belonging to the partners Wilford and Van der Hammer. He knew the country fairly well, and of course spoke the language almost like a native-born, though as a matter of fact he had first seen the light in the city of Antwerp. His proposition was that, since the future of the lower Netherlands and of Antwerp was so gloomy and uncertain, and if the city fell there was small doubt that all who refused to conform to the practices of Rome would be exiled from her walls, it would be well for a home in England to be prepared to receive as many of the family here as elected to take up their residence there. It was also suggested that he and his father should go in advance, and prepare an asylum to which they might all flee if things should go badly.

His only condition was that he might wed Gertrude and take her with him. There could be no home for either of them without a woman, and the two had long been silently attached. This plan was discussed very seriously and

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carefully, but at the last it was adopted as the best that under the circumstances could be devised. It had long been decided that one of the sons of each house should eventually settle in England, in order to facilitate the carrying on of the merchant traffic there; and Harold had always looked upon that country as his eventual home. England enjoyed peace, and what to those in other lands seemed like absolute religious liberty, under the rule of Elizabeth; and though the same cloud which hung over them here in Antwerp was rising in the horizon of her sky, there was a strong feeling that England was for Antwerp exiles the best haven of refuge, and the Wilfords' trading connections there of so many years' standing would secure them many advantages.

Harold was loath to leave the city in its present peril; but one arm was of little service to the state, and it certainly behoved that somebody began to set in order a new home, in case this happy household should be broken up. Misfortunes were falling fast upon Antwerp. By her own folly she had destroyed her one chance of filling her garners with food. She had resisted good counsel and had followed bad, so that her enemies had profited by those very measures she had taken in the hope of securing her own advantage; and latterly a sad blow had been inflicted on the cause of liberty by the capture of young Teligny by the enemy—a thing which was felt as a personal misfortune in every household in the city. The bridge was steadily growing, and although men still said the task was impossible, the city was quaking and fearful. If Harold

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were to leave at all, it behoved him to do so quickly. It would be difficult now, but a little later it might become impossible. His father was in a restless fever to be off. The quiet marriage between the lovers was speedily accomplished, and the little party started forth.

News had since been received that they had safely embarked for England, and that was a relief to all; but the double household was strangely diminished by all these departures, and the life no longer flowed on in its accustomed channels.

Joris and Otto were seldom at home. They were sent from spot to spot and fort to fort, as the exigences of the moment required; and although Lionel had his headquarters beneath his own roof, he was constantly abroad on public duty, and only Malcolm and Maurice could be counted upon by the sisters at home in case of any sudden alarm. Not that there were any really alarming tumults within the city, but there were great restlessness, discontent, and displeasure. Men who had made the blunders that had done such mischief were now abusing the authorities for having given way to the voice of the majority; and there was still a small faction of Roman Catholics who would gladly have seen the city reduced to submission as other Netherland towns had been.

Parma had been opening negotiations, too, with the Burgomaster and Council, seeking to persuade them of the gentleness and sweetness of the Spanish sovereign, and imploring them to return to their allegiance, where alone they would have safety and prosperity. He tried to show

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that the Prince of Orange had been striving only for his own advantage in seeking to foment the strife between the Netherlands and their sovereign, and made many promises of clemency and mercy to all the cities that should make submission to their royal master. But the burghers of Antwerp had tasted something too much already of Spanish mercy, and had heard enough of Philip's good faith. They still believed that France would come to their aid, and replied that they could make no answer to other advances till they had the decision from His Majesty. But they were very firm in their assertions that they had done with Philip for ever; and though they spoke highly of Parma himself, showing that both his military genius and his clemency were appreciated by them, they hinted that no compacts made by him would be observed by his royal master, and in point of fact declined to have anything to do with the question of surrender.

It was something that the burghers and the hydra-headed governing bodies should thus stand firm, with winter close at hand and the city only imperfectly victualled. Glad indeed would the citizens now have been to see the waters of the ocean rolling up to their walls, even though some thousands of oxen had been drowned by the overflow. Now that it was too late they lamented in vain over the Kowenstyn, and would have given all they possessed to see it destroyed. But the day had long gone by. The Lord of Kowenstyn had striven in vain to rouse them to their peril when it was yet time, and having only been flouted for his pains, he had sold himself to Parma. The

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dike bristled with forts and block-houses. The Spaniards had fortified it from end to end. No fear but that Parma would be alive to the necessity of maintaining that bulwark, since its demolition would undo the whole of his handiwork, and nullify the toil and skill of months. So the prospects of the city were gloomy and dark, and the public gloom seemed to be reflected in the faces of private persons, who all felt painfully the long strain.

In Hooch Straet the life of the large household had totally changed. The large living-room had been abandoned, partly because it was so much too large now for the diminished party, and looked empty and bare; partly because it was needful to exercise economy in fuel, and the kitchen fire must be kept up. The great kitchen was a pleasant room, and had a large window commanding a view over the street. Old Van der Hammer and his wife now had their chairs here, where the warmth from the stove kept them comfortable; and Roosje bustled about, over hospitable cares intent, whilst the children were almost always to be found playing round their grand-parents—for it was the chief pleasure of the poor old people now to have the little ones about them. The blanks and changes in the household had been sadly felt by them, and they were seriously discussing whether or not at the close of the siege they would abandon Antwerp and make a home in Holland or England. It was believed that Holland and Zeeland would hold out against the Spaniards even if the lower Netherlands were subdued; and as the Protestant families were driven from the latter provinces, they retired

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to the last stronghold of independence and patriotism, whilst wealth and strength seemed to leave the one place and follow them to the other, till Holland was prosperous, even in spite of the drain of the war, as she had seldom been before. Almost did the family now wish that they had migrated earlier—the elders of the party, that is. As for the younger spirits, they still believed in the victory of the righteous cause, and would have scorned to abandon their city in her hour of need. Lionel was chained there by duties he could not forego. The young soldiers and volunteers felt as though every arm was wanted, and that their own in particular could not be spared. There were moments of exhilaration and hope to lighten the burden of care, and the girls were almost as full of patriotism as the men.

The Spanish prisoners watched and listened to all, feeling very differently towards these people who had befriended them in their time of need. Alphonso was filled with gratitude. He had grown to have a deep respect for the master of the house (for such he regarded Lionel to be), and was conscious of something more than mere regard for Maud. Indeed, he was half afraid of saying too much, having surprised her alone and in tears in the deserted long room, whither he often resorted when the companionship of Diego became distasteful to him. He rose now from his seat and retired, apologizing for hindering her at her task; but he paused to look back as he reached the door, and met a glance which went far to undo any unconscious resolutions he might have been striving to make

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against letting a spell be cast upon him by a heretic maiden.

He made his exit with a beating heart, and went upstairs wondering what would be the end of it all.

In the bedchamber in which he had first opened his eyes to consciousness, after his encounter with the Antwerp mob, he found Diego sitting moodily on the edge of his bed, beating his foot impatiently upon the ground. Diego had long since recovered the use of his limbs, and could pace this apartment like a wild beast in its cage; but he never attempted to make one of the party below, as his comrade did, and save at meal-times he never appeared in their midst. Often he would not come down at all, making excuse that the stairs hurt his leg; but Alphonso knew this was a mere subterfuge, and that his real reason for refusing to appear was his haughty disdain of burgher folk, and his determination to have no more to do with them than he could help. He was fond of saying that he would far rather be in a prison than in this place; but his companion knew that this was all idle talk, for the youth knew well how much better off he was here, and how much greater chance of escape he had should there be any exchange of prisoners between the hostile camps.

Diego looked up with a scowl as his comrade came in, but seeing who it was, deigned to speak.

"Always down with those greasy burghers! I know not what has come to thee, man. Thou art no better than a woman, making friends amongst enemies, and learning

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to gossip like an old woman! Why canst thou not show the dignity thy station demands, and hold aloof from such greasy traders? *Pardiez!* I would sooner go to the devil at once than make myself the friend of this heretic crew. It will go ill with thee with our own priests when thou gettest back to them. Thou wilt smell of brimstone an thou takest not care!"

Alphonso, recalling the nature of the conversation in which he had just been indulging, coloured slightly. His face had lost all its bronze, and as by nature he was fairer than the average Spaniard, the tell-tale colour when it rose in his cheek was very visible. Diego gave a scornful laugh, but looked very much annoyed.

"Blushing like a girl! Man, thou hadst better cast away thy sword, and don a woman's petticoat! I like not the fashion in which thy time is spent, Alphonso. It is ill work playing with the devil's tools, and thou knowest well that these heretics are nothing else."

Alphonso thought of Maud's face as she had expounded her views to him, and as she had turned it upon him when he left her, and he could not but think that the devil found strange tools, if indeed he made use of such as these. And yet had not the Holy Saints been tried and tempted before by fair women, who appeared in the guise almost of angels of light? Might it not be possible that some such temptation was coming upon him? He paced once or twice up and down the room, leaving Diego's remark unanswered.

"They had better have sent us off to the common

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prison," said the latter grimly. "It would have been better for thee, if not for me."

"Better to be dead than living?—is that what thou wouldest say?—for assuredly I had not been living to-day had I been in any place less comfortable than this, watched over as I was by these good folks thou choosest to flout."

"Well, it might have been better to die in the true faith than to live to dabble in heresy, which is what thou art doing now, Alphonso. Oh yes, I know what I am saying. I can see the change in thee, and thou dost not spend so many hours of thy time away from thine old comrade and with these burgher friends for naught. Thou hast heard them read their heretical book and discourse thereon. Thou hast perchance asked more of their hell-doctrines, for thou art very curious, and the devil is ever prompting thee to peril thy soul with damnable heresy. Be warned, Alphonso de Castro, be warned! Thou art in a great and deadly peril; and if thou dost not call to thy help the Holy Saints and the Blessed Virgin, thou mayest find thyself a lost soul ere thou knowest what has come to thee. Have a care, I say, man—have a care!"

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CHAPTER X.

THE BUILDING OF THE BRIDGE.

"IF I only knew what had become of him I could bear it better," said Rodrigo, as he paced to and fro beside the sullen, swollen river, his arm linked in that of Carlos, his eyes turned towards the distant spires of Antwerp, which, however, were quite invisible through the murky fog that lay along the river valley. "If I knew for certain he was dead, it would be almost a relief; but to be a captive in yon hostile city—I dread and hate the thought of such a thing! Alphonso lying in some filthy dungeon, deprived perhaps of sufficient food, subjected to we know not what hardships and cruelties—the thought sickens me! I would to Heaven we had never trusted him with that hot-headed Diego! I would take my oath it was he who began the riot of which we heard; Alphonso alone would never have got into trouble."

"I myself now wish heartily that we had kept together; we could have restrained the headstrong rashness of Diego better than the boy. But it is useless to think now of that. What is past cannot be recalled. After all, it is but the fortune of war. We are all subject to that stern

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mistress. A chance encounter with some of yon brown-sailed vessels may give to either of us our quietus before another sun has set. We all of us go with our life in our hand. Had the boy returned from the city in safety, he might not be living to-day. Think of all those who have been lost to us since we set ourselves to this labour of Hercules, and think of what lies before us yet!"

"Verily it is no light task," said Rodrigo, as he stood to watch the great swirling river, swollen by recent heavy rains and fed by the salt ocean tides, as it rushed through the great piles which had been driven far into the soft muddy bed on both sides, and bespoke the patience and resolution of the great engineer who had resolved to put a bridle upon that turbulent water-way. "I know well we have a winter of hardship before us, and that the boy was scarce fitted to battle with all the exposure and privation which lie yet before us. But to think of his lying rotting in some Antwerp dungeon, or falling alone, hacked in pieces in their streets! It is a hateful and loathsome thought! It unmans me and makes me hate this trade of war, which once I thought the finest in the world!"

"Tush, man! thou art none the worse for such thoughts. They come to all of us from time to time, though we are none the less soldiers for them. But if Alphonso be living, we will find him yet. For Antwerp must and shall fall into the hands of our great general; and it shall be our mission, yours and mine, to seek him out and set him free, be his lodging the lowest dungeon in the city!"

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Rodrigo threw back his head, and his face cleared.

"That is a welcome thought, good Carlos. We will strive to think we shall meet again. I do but trust they will not have made a heretic of him, with their artful wiles, ere we can fly to his rescue. There was in the boy a strange vein of curiosity about these pestilent doctrines that often put me in a fever. Had we been in Madrid or in any Spanish town, I should have trembled for his safety many and many a time. It is not well to think too much of these things."

"As I have warned him again and yet again. It is the business of our priests to make doctrine, and our part is to accept and believe what they teach us. Why Alphonso could not be content thus to do I know not. We have never been troubled by the thoughts which entered his head. But it is better to think of him dead, or in captivity in a hostile town, than in the dungeons of the Holy Office."

Rodrigo could not restrain a shudder as the word passed his companion's lips. The Holy Office could not but be almost as much a terror to even orthodox Romanists as it was to heretics, if they really knew its methods. For who could know that some miserable wretch in the extremity of suffering might not mention the name of any person that was suggested to him, or that entered his mind, as one with whom he had exchanged words on sacred subjects, or had heard drop a hint that suggested the notion of heresy? It had been demonstrated before now that the most devout and orthodox sons of the

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Church could be haled away to these fearful dungeons as well as the waverers or openly-pronounced heretics. And although there was a singular apathy upon the people of Spain, and the Inquisition was established almost without a murmur from them, it was due more to the absolute thraldom which bound them under the will of the priest and Pontiff than to any real sympathy with the methods employed to extirpate heresy. And certainly thinking men of all classes regarded with a species of horror the machinery now in general use. It was not many who dared to utter their feelings, but none the less were they entertained by very large sections of the community.

"Ay, better there in Antwerp than that," answered Rodrigo in low tones. "But I trust if he be still living they are not striving to win him over as a convert to their pestilent doctrines. Methinks he would be something too ready to listen to the voice of the tempter. But I know not if they are as bent on making men think alike as our holy fathers."

"I know not that either. From what I hear of their strange doctrines, every man may take his Bible in his hand and stand forth as a teacher and expounder. At that rate there will be almost as many religions as persons in the land. Well may our priests call it Babel—a city of confusion."

"Ay, a city divided against itself—that cannot stand. No, no; there is no safety save in the pale of the Holy Church. Yet I would I knew what had befallen my brother—body and soul."

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Carlos and Rodrigo had had better fortune than their two comrades upon the night of the visit to Antwerp. They had proceeded quietly with the investigations they wished to make on behalf of the Prince of Parma, and had not been molested in any way by the few passers-by they met in the streets. At the appointed time they repaired to the narrow creek, and found the boat and the old man awaiting them there, but no sign of their comrades. After long delay they became uneasy, and it was important not to lose the ebb-tide. They therefore set forth to seek them, but could find no trace of them anywhere. They did, however, hear from some French soldiers, with whom they got into conversation, that there had been a disturbance some hours before in the very place where they had parted from their companions, and that two Spanish spies had either been killed or made prisoners, it seemed uncertain which. They strove all they could to learn what their fate had been, but altogether without success, and at last had been forced to abandon the quest and return to their boat, knowing that they could do nothing for the succour of their friends, and not seeing how their own captivity could in any wise benefit them. They had therefore returned to the camp in a gloomy frame of mind, and knew not even now what had befallen the other pair.

Days and weeks had passed away since then, and still no tidings had come from the lost comrades. The Prince of Parma had himself expressed regret at the supposed fate of the two youths of promise, but he

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was too much pressed on all hands to have overmuch thought to spare for individual losses. He had embarked upon a mighty enterprise, upon the success of which he had staked his military reputation; and whilst resolved to carry through the undertaking at which the city of Antwerp was openly gibing, he was confronted with almost insurmountable difficulties and suffered the greatest privations.

The extraordinary devotion of his generals to that most unlovable and treacherous of sovereigns, Philip the Second of Spain, is one of those things which cannot but excite the wonder of the reader of history as he studies the story of those stirring days.

Whilst giving to his servants tasks of the utmost magnitude to perform, he was grossly negligent to provide them with those things necessary to the success of the undertaking, and still more grossly dilatory in responding to the urgent appeals made to him, even when he had been made to see that without food or clothing, arms or ammunition, his troops could not carry through the work required of them.

Parma was always in the greatest distress for money. Frequently his soldiers deserted by hundreds, so weary and disgusted were they by this life of hardship, and made hopeless of receiving the long arrears of pay due to them. In many of the conquered cities the garrisons were well-nigh starving, and the cavalry had dwindled to almost nothing. The Prince had to depend greatly on the loans he could raise amongst his own officers, and his

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own resources were always at the disposal of the master who expected so much and did so little, and who seemed sometimes for months together to have completely forgotten that gallant little band encamped on the oozy shores and dikes of the Scheldt, exposed to all the rigours of a northern winter, and engaged upon a task which might well make the stoutest heart quail.

Carlos de Cueva was at this time one of the most able supporters of the great general. Wealthy almost as a prince, and as generous and enthusiastic as he was wealthy, he was a tower of strength to that little camp at Kalloo; and the ill-clad, ill-fed soldiers and mechanics, carpenters and gunners, who were making that spot ring with the sounds of martial industry, had reason indeed to bless his open-handed liberality. Through his efforts it was that they were enabled to carry on their work, that they had food to eat and clothes to wear.

"I trust you will get your reward one day for all that you are doing for my poor soldiers," the Prince once said to his young officer. "I will take good care that our royal master is made aware of your loyal service; and I will keep strict account of all the moneys you have advanced him for the maintenance of his troops."

Carlos bowed, but also smiled slightly; he had small hope of receiving much save empty words from his sovereign.

"It is not for him that I do it," he said afterwards to Rodrigo, as they walked back to their own quarters. "I trust I am a loyal subject, yet for our Monarch I would

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not thus impoverish myself nor expend my revenues. It is for our great general that I do it—the greatest soldier in all the world! I would lay down my life and lose every florin I possess for him. For verily a greater man than he has never lived on this earth!"

The faculty Parma possessed of gaining the enthusiastic devotion of all who served under him was a strong factor in his success. His soldiers, all of them, knew that he never spared himself, and that where the danger and the toil were the greatest, there would their general be found, bearing the brunt in his own person. Moreover, his care for his soldiers and his compassion for them in their hardship won their hearts as much as his personal bravery. Living as simply as a hermit himself, eating sparingly and drinking hardly anything but water, he differed in no wise from one of themselves; and it was well known that when there was real scarcity in the camp, he would deny himself in order that his soldiers might be fed. In all his many letters to his royal master, in all his earnest and piteous appeals for the supplies which should have been forthcoming as a matter of course, he never once mentions himself, or has a word to say as to any personal hardships endured. His compassion is all for his soldiers, those faithful, gallant soldiers, who stuck by him through thick and thin, and toiled day and night through hardships of every kind to carry out the work on which his heart was set. For them were all his compassion and laudation; his own devotion was taken simply as a matter of course. His soldiers instinctively knew that their great general

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was also their best friend; and though there were mercenaries, and even some amongst the Spanish troops, who deserted owing to famine and sickness, yet the bulk of those immediately about Parma remained stanch under every privation.

And now this wonderful feat of bridging the Scheldt was being patiently and systematically carried out. Whilst the burghers of Antwerp were laughing at the bare notion of putting a bridle on that mighty volume of water, and deluding themselves with the belief that France would quickly come to their aid, the little island of Kalloo was ringing with sounds of industry, and bit by bit the great work was going on.

Two forts had been erected at opposite sides of the river, called respectively Fort Philip and Fort St. Mary. These forts were garrisoned, and provided with heavy ordnance, so that they commanded the river from bank to bank, and protected those at work there from the assault of vessels coming down from the city, or up the river from Holland and Zeeland. When the forts were completed, the work of pile-driving began; and a great work this was, for each huge pile was driven fifty feet into the oozy bed of the river, and this tremendous bulwark of huge piles extended five hundred feet into the stream on either side.

The amount of labour thus involved may be better imagined than described, with the tidal river rising and falling, the autumnal storms often lashing it into fury, and the constant fear in the minds of the workers of some

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concerted attack upon it from the city and its allies outside.

"I marvel they thus let us alone," Carlos said that evening to Rodrigo, as they visited the scene of industry, so familiar in all its details to every person stationed near. "They have a well-manned fleet of those amphibious and fierce Zeelanders over yonder, and Antwerp itself has many good ships, to say nothing of that monster vessel—that *Bugaboo*, of which we hear so much—which is being built for our overthrow. Methinks the Holy Virgin must surely be fighting for us, and have sent them some strong delusion to blind their eyes withal. It is marvellous to me that day by day goes by, and we have nothing worse to encounter than those skirmishing attacks which we have had up and down the river ever since we established ourselves here. Why, if I were one of yon rebel herd, either within or without the city walls, I would stir heaven and earth to devise some great general attack upon this outwork which should demolish it at one fell swoop. I trow our Prince has been looking for this from the beginning. But the city seems to be wrapped in sleep."

"It is plain the Prince of Orange is dead," answered Rodrigo thoughtfully. "Were he alive we should never work thus undisturbed. But these low-born rebels are now like a body without a head. They can think of nothing and do nothing to save themselves. See how they are ever playing into our hands by their blunders. First the Kowenstyn Dyke given over to us, then the Saftingen cut through, and our water-way furnished us. I

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marvel that the dead Prince can rest in his grave whilst such things are being done through lack of his guiding arm."

"Oh, the devil has him fast, and will not let him go now!" laughed Carlos. "He did harm enough in his lifetime for ten men. He will not be let out of hell fire to disturb the peace of the Church again. Without him these dogs of heretics can do nothing. With time and patience Antwerp will be ours; and after Antwerp has fallen all the country will submit. They had best be quick with their great vessel the *War's End*, else the war will have ended in a different way ere their monster is ready for action."

But although the Prince had great hopes of succeeding with his bridge, he was in a very desperate state, as has just been explained, owing to the lack of funds and supplies; and if he could have induced the city to return to its allegiance without further severities, he would have been very thankful. For the most difficult part of the work still remained to be done, and that in the teeth of winter storms and the assaults of the great ice-floes, which were like to be more redoubtable enemies than the enemy's ships had so far been. The pile-driving had been successful so far as it went; but in the middle of the river was a wide, wide space in which the current ran too strong and the river was too deep for any further pile-driving to be possible. Between the two great bulwarks already erected there yawned a great gap of dark, swirling water, above twelve hundred feet wide; and before the long-

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talked-of bridge could become a reality, this great chasm must be filled by floating barges, lashed together and planked over, as the piles were fast being planked, so that a wide continuous road from bank to bank should effectually close the river, and make a permanent highway, upon which the Spanish soldiers could march to and fro at will before the very eyes of the scornful Antwerp burghers.

This, indeed, was Parma's great design, and already he had the materials under his hand for the accomplishment of his purpose. His barges were built or being built, his preparations were all most carefully made, and both he and the Marquis Richebourg were ubiquitous in their task of examining into every detail of the work, and encouraging the men engaged in the colossal task. But that it was a colossal task the great general very well knew; and none understood better than he how fearful would be the peril to its success were Antwerp to awaken from the inexplicable state of apathy into which she appeared to have fallen, and make a determined assault upon his camp and bridge in concert with all the strength of the Zeeland fleet.

Probably, had the impoverished condition of Parma's army and the straits to which he was often reduced been known to the foe, something more energetic might have been attempted; but the general had the wisdom and acuteness always to put the best face upon his affairs, and he certainly gave every appearance of strength and confidence and prosperity. It was only to his master in Spain that he let the true nature of his condition be known; and only after the lapse of centuries has the

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world learned in what desperate plight the brilliant commander often stood.

Parma, too, had begun to feel a real tenderness towards the people of the Netherlands, and would gladly have saved them further horrors of war. He had none of Alva's stern ferocity and cruelty; he recognized devotion and zeal when he saw them, and although he was convinced that these good qualities were wasted in an evil cause, he appreciated them, and felt kindly towards his foes, even though they gave him an infinity of trouble by their stubborn resistance.

So he attempted once again, before taking the final steps with regard to his bridge, to induce the people of the city to listen to reason. He was prepared to offer generous terms to them if they would but capitulate and return to submission; but it need hardly be said that it never once entered his head to grant that religious toleration for which the rebellious Provinces had been struggling for above a generation. The idea of sanctioning heretical worship was abhorrent to him. He was no theologian, but he had been brought up to believe that the Roman Catholic faith was the one faith of the Church, and that all else was of the devil; and to this belief he tenaciously adhered. Not that Philip would have budged an inch from his position had Parma been never so eager to gain this point for the rebellious cities; but saving this one great matter, the general was willing to concede much, and was also desirous that there should be no massacre of heretical burghers, but only that they should be exiled

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from the city if they could not be brought to conform to the established faith of Rome.

Philip would have preferred hanging or burning them all; but this protracted war had taught him some lessons, and of late he had been constrained to permit an exodus of these detested persons from all cities which had submitted themselves anew to his dominion. Forth from the lower Provinces, therefore, had gone the best and wealthiest and ablest of its inhabitants, taking with them to Holland or England their money, their industry, and that prosperity which had made the Netherlands what they were. It was too soon as yet to see the fatal results of Philip's policy of oppression, but it was speedily to be fully seen. The "reconciled" Provinces reaped as their reward nothing but poverty, oppression, and misery, which quickly reduced them to a level far lower than anything they had experienced during the long war; whilst the portion of the country which still held out and stood boldly up for freedom, civil and religious, throve and prospered despite the drain of the war, and became an example in the eyes of the world of what might be accomplished by resolution and devotion in a noble cause.

So negotiations were opened with the city, but could not be entertained, as the Council explained, because of the prior negotiation commenced with France. Moreover, the burghers boldly declared that they had seen enough of the Spanish monarch's tenderness and good faith, and declined to have anything more to do with it.

Parma's lips curled, half in scorn and half in compassion,

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as he read the ponderous phrases in which the reply was couched. He sent one more letter in reply, assuring the citizens that Henry the Third of France was far too good a friend to his own master ever to dream of encouraging rebellion in these Provinces; and that the King of Spain could foil him in a hundred ways, even were he to attempt to take upon himself the cause of the Netherlanders. As for the religious question, which he noted they asserted to be the sole cause of the long war, he confessed himself unable to understand how the cause of Christianity or the doctrines of Jesus could be forwarded by taking up arms against their lawful sovereign, overwhelming their country with watery desolation, and reducing the whole land to a state of misery and chaos. This was not religion as taught by the Church, and he confessed himself unable to understand it. But no answer was returned to this last communication, and after a brief interlude the work of closing the bridge was begun in good earnest.

It was with the deepest anxiety that the devoted little army watched the descent of the first ice-floes as they came charging down the rapid, swollen river, and dashed themselves against the outer palisade of the great planked pathway which ran far out into the river on either side. But the pile-driving had been well done; and though the heavy timbers creaked and groaned, the bulwark stood firm in spite of the lashing of winter storms and the backward and forward sway of the great frozen floes as the tide rose and fell morning and night.

And now began the difficult task of getting the barges

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into position, and laying down upon them the continuation of the planked pathway which projected five hundred feet from either shore. These barges were above sixty feet long—the width of the great bridge—and a gap of some twenty feet was left between them, where the black water swirled freely. These barges were anchored stem and stern, bound together in many places by hawsers and chains of great strength; cross-rafters were placed upon them, and then they were ready for the continuation of the great planked pathway which gradually extended further and further from either shore, till an ever-narrowing gap marked the progress of the wonderful bridge, and incited the willing workers to redoubled efforts.

But the great general had another supplementary device which was of great value in the final construction of the bridge. He had had two huge rafts built, supported in the water by empty casks, and composed of heavy timbers bound together, with a serrated outer edge composed of sharp iron prongs, hooks, and teeth. These two rafts were each above twelve hundred feet in length, and were anchored in the river immediately above and below the bridge, at about eighty yards distant from it, forming a protection for the floating portion of the structure, and for part of the pile-work as well. It need hardly be said what an immense assistance to the workers was this outer rampart. It checked in some degree the rapid flow of the river, it caught and detained the masses of ice coming up or down with tide or current. Had any attack been made during the later stages of the building, it would

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have obliged the attacking vessels to come close inshore to get round it, and then they would have been exposed to the hottest fire from the forts and from the soldiers along the banks. But whether from motives of apathy or fear, no real attempt had been made to hinder the work. The Spaniards were on the alert for a foe who did not appear disposed to come to close quarters, and the work went on from day to day unimpeded.

One great peril did for a moment menace Parma's work, as will be related in the following chapter, though not a peril actually to the bridge itself. The work there went steadily forward, success in the great undertaking warming the hearts of the workers and lightening their toil.

Carlos and Rodrigo were enthusiastic over the work, and were able assistants of the Prince and Marquis. It was Carlos who undertook to supply the guns with which each barge was to be supplied, one pointing up and the other down stream. There were pieces of artillery to be purchased in Ghent by any one who had money to pay for them, and he and Rodrigo made a personal expedition to that conquered city to see after this matter and bring home their convoy.

It formed a break in the monotony of camp life; but the aspect of the fallen city was hardly encouraging to those who wished to believe that the rule of the Spanish monarch was a wise and good one for the people over whom he ruled. Houses were closed and streets half deserted. The most respected and opulent of the citizens had left the place, or were fast leaving. Grass had begun

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to grow in many thoroughfares, and a stagnation and listlessness were brooding over the place strangely different from the pulsating energy and excitement which they had noted a month or two ago as the prevailing atmosphere in Antwerp.

Thanks to the piercing of the Saftingen Dike, the way to Ghent was easy, and there was no difficulty in getting the pieces of ordnance brought down to the camp at Kalloo. The young officers saw the convoy safely off, but remained themselves a while longer in the city, striving to negotiate purchases of grain and salted beef for the hungry soldiers, who often had just enough to keep body and soul together.

Ghent could not but be interesting to the youths, being a city that had gone through so many vicissitudes during the war, and had been the scene of so many famous (or infamous) treacheries. They heard the story of these from many lips as they went about their business, talking to the people for the sake of information, or sitting by the stove at night, and hearing stories of past sieges and betrayals. They could not but feel some interest in the views of the conquered citizens, even though these were advanced with some doubtfulness and timidity. The religious aspect of the quarrel between their king and his subjects had small interest for them. They were not like Alphonso. No qualm of doubt as to the teaching in which they had been reared had ever troubled them; it did not even interest them to know what the heretics thought on these subjects. But upon the civil side of the question they

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did not object to discourse, nor to hear what the citizens had to say for themselves; and despite the fact that all attempts at negotiation between the belligerents had been prefaced by a wearisome historical summary, these two Spaniards had never realized how the recent government of Philip had been regarded in the rebellious Provinces. This was now explained to them by an old citizen in whose house they lodged. He had always been a Roman Catholic, and therefore had not left the city; but he still held grimly to his point that the Ancient Constitution had been grossly violated, and that although submission had become inevitable under present circumstances, rebellion was not only excusable, but actually right and proper.

And then he proceeded to prove to the guests what had been the terms of this Ancient Constitution, and to demonstrate that in rebelling his countrymen had been entirely within their recognized rights.

The Ancient Constitution set forth that there were three estates in the country—clergy, nobility, and citizens —and that these estates were equal, so that one could not be raised above the others without the consent of the other two. Another point set forth was that no man could be tried for any offence whatever save in the open and ordinary courts of the land. Foreigners were ineligible for provincial offices; whilst any violation of the privileges thus secured to the dwellers in the Netherlands released them from their oath of allegiance to the sovereign who had not observed their rights.

It hardly needed to be pointed out to Carlos and

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Rodrigo that for any monarch who had subscribed to these conditions to attempt to foist the Inquisition upon the country was the very grossest violation of treaty.

That innovation alone was enough to release the people from their oath of allegiance; and they had innumerable other grievances to show, in which their privileges had been illegally curtailed and their faith tampered with. The old man spoke temperately, for his heart was well-nigh broken by all he had passed through, and the active stage of indignant sorrow had been merged in the calm apathy of despair.

"We have been in the right all through, young Señors," he said; "but the struggle has been too hard for us, and treachery has often done what force and violence could not achieve. Ghent has fallen, and almost all of Flanders and Brabant. Antwerp and Brussels are doomed, and then the whole of the lower Netherlands will be 'reconciled.' I am an old man—it matters little to me what happens now; but mark my words, young sirs—for you will live to see it, though I shall not—your royal master will reap but a barren victory when he has reduced these unhappy lands beneath his yoke again. Only as free and happy can we of these Provinces prosper. To us servitude and slavery bring death and misery in their wake. Your monarch may think he has done a great deed; yet he will find that he has but gathered Dead Sea fruit. He has sucked the life-blood from us; it will be for him to see what a dead corpse of a once living land can do for him. Ah, would that the Prince of Orange

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had lived! Then there had been hope for us; now there is none."

With these gloomy forecasts ringing in their ears did Carlos and Rodrigo return to their duties at Kalloo. With a sense of uneasy wonder they sometimes asked themselves whether indeed this old man's words could be true.

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CHAPTER XI.

BOIS-LE-DUC.

"JORIS! Otto! Now this is an unlooked-for joy! Whence come ye, and with what news?"

The two young men, who looked as though they had travelled far or else in some haste, were greeting the party at home with eager pleasure. They had been for some time absent from Antwerp now, having been despatched from the city with letters to Count Hohenlo in Gertruydenberg, and it had been uncertain whether or not they would succeed in finding entrance into the city again. The country was in a very disturbed state, and Parma's vigilance made it difficult for the beleaguered city to hold communication with other places; but the preparations for its isolation were not yet complete, and by a little clever management persons who knew the place and the country round could usually contrive to elude the vigilance of the Spanish soldiers.

Otto and Joris had frequently been used in like missions. They were well qualified for the task, being bold youths, strong and wiry of frame, active and alert in their movements, speaking several languages with sufficient

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fluency, and remarkably well acquainted with the city and the surrounding country. They delighted, moreover, in the variety which such messages brought into their lives. Within the city there was little stirring. A strange apathy seemed to have fallen upon the burghers. They had made up their minds, first, that the winter storms would wreck the threatened bridge; secondly, that the French would shortly come to their aid, and render superfluous any determined effort on their part. Resolute and united in declining Parma's overtures, they were resolute and united in nothing else. There was no well-concerted attack made upon the bridge, no effort to combine with the Zeelanders to sweep away the threatened barrier, and undo the long labour of the industrious enemy. The old Italian in his dark den laughed mockingly over the pusillanimity of the citizens, and uttered dark sayings as to what he could accomplish had they but the wisdom to consult him. Lionel's face grew grave and stern. His heart was beginning to despair for his town. He had never placed any faith in the French negotiation, and it began to be plain now that if that failed, ruin stared them in the face. The old Van der Hammer still held that it might yet end in good. He could not believe that any monarch would deliberately reject the sovereignty of a kingdom so wealthy and prosperous as these Provinces might be if once relieved from the burden of the long war. It was impossible for any person not in the very heart of the intrigue to understand the deep game of cross-purposes and delusion that was being played by the Spanish King, the Pope, and the

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three parties in France. Lionel felt an instinctive distrust of the French nation, and a great contempt for the present feeble monarch; but this feeling was not shared by the majority of the Antwerp citizens, nor by their great Burgomaster, and their eyes remained fatally blinded to their peril.

And now to see the faces of any who had been abroad in the world was a source of great pleasure to those shut up in the city; and the diminished party of the double house crowded about Joris and Otto with words of welcome, eagerly questioning them as to how they had come and what was going on around those walls which were hemming them in.

"Have you come to stay? Are you to return to the garrison here? What have you been doing these past weeks? What is passing in France? Is the sovereignty of the States accepted by the monarch there? How goes the bridge? Have you seen aught of that? Tell us all the news, for we have heard nothing these many days."

These and a dozen more questions were eagerly showered upon the brothers as they stood warming themselves at the stove, and looking with smiling faces on the home circle. Maud was lighting the lamp, Roosje and Coosje hastily laying the supper-table; for the travellers must be refreshed, and there was as yet plenty of food in the city, although householders were learning to be careful and to husband their stores. In a dark, sheltered corner, somewhat removed from the group about the stove, stood Alphonso, his eyes asking for information almost as eagerly as did

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the lips of the others. Joris gave him a smile and a nod; he shared in the general liking which all felt for their prisoner. But there was much to talk about and discuss; and in a few minutes all were seated round the table, only waiting till the savoury soup should be lifted from the fire to commence the last and most social meal of the day.

"I trust you bring good news," said Lionel, addressing his brothers-in-law; "I am hungering to hear of some active enterprise to be undertaken in the cause of liberty. I am sick at heart with all this long delay, and fearful that when we wake up to see the errors of our ways, we shall awake, too, to the fact that our day and our chance have alike been lost. Come you from Hohenlo? He is not wont to be idle, albeit something too reckless and headstrong. Let us have your news; you have not been sent hither for nothing."

"We have brought despatches for the Burgomaster. The States have resolved to make a diversion for the relief of Antwerp. What say you to the thought of a dash upon Hertogenbosch? It would be a pretty stroke to secure that place, for the Prince of Parma derives large supplies from thence; and if we were to hold it instead, we could cut off the bulk of his supplies from reaching him."

Lionel's eyes dilated

"Marry, a right good thought!" he cried. "Is that what Hohenlo proposes?"

"Yes, verily; and to be done right speedily. There is no garrison in the town; and albeit the citizens are war-

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like and fierce, they will be able to do little against the trained troops we hope to pour into their gates. Captain Kleerhagen knows the place well. His wife was a native, and he is familiar with the whole neighbourhood. He has reconnoitred the city of late, and declares it to be but carelessly guarded. A sudden, well-planned surprise, and a dashing attack such as our Count is famous for, may carry the whole town at a blow. We have brought advices of our purpose to the Burgomaster here, whose military genius none doubt. If he gives his sanction and approval to the plan, it will be speedily and boldly put into action. We are to return to-morrow with his reply."

"Verily an excellently-devised scheme!" quoth Lionel, with unwonted eagerness. "It would strike a harder blow at our great enemy than any attack upon his palisade from within or without the city, even were men prepared to make such attack." And then the young soldiers, together with old Van der Hammer, drew together round one corner of the table, and made with the implements thereon a rough map of the country, demonstrating to each other the position of the place and the effects its capture would have upon Parma's camp, and listening eagerly to all Joris and Otto had gleaned respecting the state the town was in, and the chances of a successful surprise. Not knowing the dwindling and miserable condition of the Spanish troops, their general was severely commented upon for leaving so important a town without a garrison; but it was all to the advantage of the patriot

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party that this omission had been made, and they intended to profit by it.

Whilst this hubbub was arising in one portion of the room, Alphonso, who had taken his customary seat beside Maud, ventured to lean towards her, and to ask, in a low voice,—

"What is this Hertogenbosch of which they are all speaking?"

"Perhaps you would better know it by the name of Bois-le-Duc, Señor, or Bolduc, as we sometimes call it. It is one of the four chiefest cities of Brabant, and has always held for your King Philip, though many places around have come over to our cause. The citizens there are more fierce and warlike than in any other town in the land, 'tis said; and it has always been a thriving and prosperous place, with many manufactures that are held in high repute."

"Bois-le-Duc! ah, I well know now what place is meant! I went there more than once to forage for our soldiers when we were in need of supplies." Alphonso's face looked rather grave and troubled, for he remembered once hearing the Prince of Parma say that if Bois-le-Duc were by any mischance to fall into the enemy's hands, he would be forced to give up his attempt to bridge the Scheldt, and practically abandon the siege of Antwerp.

Maud saw the look of concern upon his face, and said, with a slight smile,—

"I fear me, Señor, that our pleasure in these tidings is no pleasure to you. We feel it hard to remember that in these things you are our foe, albeit in others—"

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"Sweet lady, I would not hear that word from your lips; it has too harsh a sound. I cannot feel that I am a foe to those who dwell beneath this roof. Indeed I scarce know whether I am not half a traitor to my cause in thinking as I do. Though there be moments when the old feelings come back upon me, and when I hear of trouble and disappointment threatening the Spanish arms, I can scarce rejoice; yet I would not rejoice at any trouble that might overwhelm this threatened city."

He spoke eagerly, and Maud smiled as their eyes met for a moment. These whispered confidences and fleeting glances were beginning to be meat and drink to them both during these long and colourless days.

"I would not have you a traitor to your cause, Señor," she answered softly, "and methinks you could scarce be that; yet I am glad that our misfortunes would not cause you joy. I, too, have learned to respect and admire your great general, though I cannot wish his success in the undertaking upon which he has now embarked."

At that moment Malcolm entered the room, bringing with him the small and sardonic-looking Gianibelli, who had of late consented sometimes to emerge from his den, and, with his daughter, to join the family party in Hooch Straet. He was keenly interested in the siege—from a scientific rather than a political standpoint—and entered with quick vehemence into the argument now going on; for he was wonderfully versed in all questions of military and engineering matters, and his quick, irritable speeches and keen strictures upon the leading men of the day had

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a value which Lionel had learned to appreciate. These, in a more modified fashion, he sometimes echoed; for he had often found that the Mantuan was a wonderful forecaster of the course of public events, although his prophecies were generally on the side of disaster.

Veronica followed her father, and sat between Alphonso and Malcolm at the supper-table. It was a pleasure to Alphonso to speak the Italian tongue with her, and she felt a sympathy and compassion for him as a foreigner and a prisoner. But there was not much chance of individual conversation that night, as all thoughts were engrossed by the theme under discussion.

"It is a good enough plan," said Gianibelli—"a good enough plan if it do not break down somewhere. But I would it were intrusted to any other commander than that wild Hohenlo. He will ruin all by his headstrong folly if he have not greater good fortune than he merits. Vain young popinjay, with his curling love-locks and his broidered vesture! I have small hope of any good from such as he. Look how Treslong has befooled the States and this city! Vain fools and dullards all of them! If Antwerp would save herself, she had best look to the nature of the men to whom she intrusts these missions."

"Yet Hohenlo lacks not for bravery," answered Otto eagerly. "He is a very perfect soldier. His men will follow him anywhere."

"Ay, if he will give them plunder enough for their greedy maws! Phew, boy! any idle popinjay can get a following of feather-headed jonkhers to follow him. Doubtless

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his soldiers all hope to sack the town and be rich for life. Let them beware of the old Belgic ferocity of which Julius Cæsar wrote, for they say it lingers yet in the burghers of Bois-le-Duc. Let them beware of that, and be wise and prudent. Many a victory has been lost by the folly of a rash young leader."

"I could wish some other commander had been chosen," said Lionel, with thoughtful brow. "And yet Hohenlo lacks not for valour, and a dashing enterprise like this wants a brilliant and courageous commander. Are you to be numbered amongst the men who will take part in the expedition?" he added, turning upon the two messengers, who were appeasing their hunger in Roosje's substantial soup.

Joris nodded silently. Otto set down his cup to say,—

"I trow we shall be the first to see the city. So far as the matter has yet been planned, we are to go amongst the fifty picked men who are to accompany Captain Kleerhagen as an advance-guard, to see how an entrance may best be effected. We have won a reputation, Joris and I, for such work as this. We are always sent forth as scouts and spies when there is need of such. We shall be amongst those who are to try to see if the gate may not be taken by surprise in the night, before the city is well awake. Men say that there is but a small guard there—that the town rests secure in the strength of its burgher soldiers; and thus if we can but surprise it whilst these are as yet scarce awake we might carry the whole place at a blow. That is our intention, and that is what Count Hohenlo hopes. Captain

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Kleerhagen has been several times to reconnoitre the ground, and each time he brings back reports which fill us with assurance of success."

The Italian raised a skinny brown finger and pointed it full at the speaker; his dark eyes flashed suddenly and brilliantly.

"Let your captains have a care, boy, that they be not too full of assurance—that they count not the day won when the fight is but half begun! Thus have victories been lost a hundred times before—ay, and will be a hundred times again! Let them look to it! let them look to it! Fools of Dutchmen! Their heads are as thick as their ale—and as weak! Let them look to it! let them look to it!"

No offence was taken at Gianibelli's strictures on the national character. They were all used to scathing words from the excitable little genius, and put up with it equably, both on account of their respect for his brilliant intellect and out of affection for Veronica, whom they all liked and pitied. Alphonso leaned towards her, and remarked, in a low tone, that her father did not appear to have acquired any great opinion of the nation amongst whom he had elected to take up his abode, and she flashed a quick smile at him as she made answer,—

"Ah, Signor, my father has the same fault to find with them all—his own people, or yours, or these citizens of Antwerp. To him they are all blind fools; they will not listen to him. They cannot see that his wisdom is greater than theirs. I trow there will come a day when they will

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be forced to listen to him; but it has not come yet. And when he travelled to your country it was just the same: he left it vowing to be avenged on the proud Spaniards for the insult and contumely they had heaped upon him. He is still brooding over that threat, albeit I know not if ever he will carry it out."

"He is a wonderful man," struck in Malcolm from the other side, as he leaned over to get a better view of Veronica's bright face. "Do you know, Señor, that he threatens to destroy yon wondrous bridge your countrymen are building—if, indeed, the ice do not sweep it all away ere long—by some mysterious measure of his own? What would your prince think of him if he accomplished his design?"

Alphonso smiled slightly. He believed Gianibelli to be a genius, but he also thought him slightly mad. He did not fear that any work of his great general's would be seriously damaged by the artifice of this obscure Mantuan mechanician. He knew, of course, much less of him and his methods than Malcolm did, although he had once visited his workroom and seen some wonderful contrivances, which, as the inventor declared, ought to turn the world over, if men had the sense to appreciate their value and the results to which they might lead.

"We should say that the devil had been conjured up to work a miracle for Antwerp," he answered, smiling. "You know that we are all good Catholics, and believe in a devil."

"We, too, do that, Señor," answered Maud, with a touch

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of grave severity in her tone; for she thought the reply savoured of derision for the religion she upheld. "I trow we have known as much opposition from the devil and his angels as ever you can have done. We have good cause to believe in him."

Alphonso caught the accent of reproof in her tone, and recognized, with a thrill of pleasure, that Maud would fain have found in him a friend to her religious beliefs, as well as on other matters. He answered at once with a change of tone,—

"I crave your pardon, sweet Mistress Maud. I have learned so many new things these past weeks that it is hard to keep them all in mind. Time was when I was taught that all heretics were under the especial protection of the devil, who regarded them as his own children and servants. I have learned to think very differently of late. I pray you, pardon the passing jest."

"Indeed, Señor, I crave your pardon if I seemed to reprove you. It is not for a woman to assume the office of teacher."

"Nay, say not so, lady," answered the young man, with sudden earnestness; "it is from such lips as yours that I would fain be taught."

Maud dropped her eyes, and a soft colour stole into her cheeks. None else at table noticed the little by-play between those two; all were eagerly discussing the proposed expedition save, perhaps, Malcolm and Veronica, who were talking low together over some equally engrossing theme.

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The juffrouw Van der Hammer had seated herself between her two boys, Joris and Otto, and kept looking hungrily into their faces with the pathetic wistfulness of a mother who receives her sons back from a life of constant peril, and knows that they are shortly going forth again to encounter danger from which they may never return. Trained as were the Dutch people of those days to look upon death and loss calmly and resignedly, the mother-spirit is the same in all ages; and though no word of murmuring escaped her lips, the good woman's heart was heavy within her. Young Philip Wilford had gone forth in health and strength to face the foe, and had come back only to die. Perchance of those two brave lads of hers one might never return from the undertaking so eagerly planned and discussed. True, she had said the same many times before, and still her own circle remained unbroken. Yet hers was almost the only family in the city, so far as she knew, that had not paid its tribute to the bloody war; and she often asked herself, with a shuddering sigh, how long she could send forth her boys to fight on the side of freedom and receive them back safe and sound as heretofore.

Demonstrations of affection were not common in that household, closely as its members were bound together; but to-night the mother would slip her hand beneath the table, and seek for the hand of one or other of her sons, and press it with a soft touch. The pressure would always be returned, and the young men would turn a smiling glance upon the little wrinkled face of their mother. They knew how she must feel; but they had too much of the

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soldier spirit in them to be overmuch affected themselves by the knowledge of the daily peril in which they stood. Skirmishes with the enemy were matters of daily occurrence, though the life within the city was too monotonous to be to their taste. They had had many narrow escapes from capture or death. They had been under fire oftener than they could count, and had grown up more or less with the smoke of guns in their nostrils. It was nothing but pleasure to them to think of the proposed expedition; and as they bid their mother good-night before retiring to their room for a brief night's rest, they told her to keep a brave heart, for they were well assured they were going to strike a great blow in the cause of freedom, and that if Bois-le-Duc once fell into their hands they might well set Parma and his bridge at defiance, for he could scarce continue his work so fettered and harassed as he would then be.

The hearts of all the household were full of hope when the young men started off in the dark of a cold January morning, with their despatches safe beneath their leather jerkins. They knew so well now how to elude the enemy's outposts, and slip in and out of the city at will, that no anxiety on that score was entertained. It was the thought of the surprise or assault to be made on Bois-le-Duc that was exercising the minds of all. There was always some loss even when victory crowned the day; and it was felt that Joris and Otto would certainly be in the forefront of the danger, whatever it might be. The evil auguries of the wily old Italian were in the minds of all. They did

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not look upon him by any manner of means as a prophet. At the same time, he was a shrewd critic of men, and a keen observer of the ways of the world; and both the Wilford and Van der Hammer families had come to have a certain distrust of their leaders since the death of the great Prince who had held them all together and assisted them with his counsel and advice. There was no one who would not listen to words of counsel from William the Silent, but many were impatient of the smallest control from anybody else. Admiral Treslong had already shown that spirit of insubordination which had been so fatal to the victualling of Antwerp; and it was well known that Count Hohenlo, though a brave soldier and stanch patriot, was reckless, impulsive, and self-willed, and would not be counselled or guided. Handsome, dashing, and daring, he had the knack of inspiring his soldiers with courage to do and dare; but many other qualities necessary for a successful general were lacking to him, and he was not the man to whom the Prince of Orange would, in all probability, have intrusted this important assault.

Perhaps this fact was in the mind of Joris and Otto as, with the little company of fifty picked soldiers, they cautiously drew near to the walls of the city, and halted in the dark at about a bow-shot from the Antwerp gate.

They were under Captain Kleerhagen, who knew every foot of the country round, and who halted his little band in a wooded hollow where they could picket their horses in something like comfort—for there was shelter from the biting wind and abundance of dead leaves for bedding—

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and then selected six of his band to accompany him in a stealthy approach to the gate itself.

Joris and Otto were both numbered in this six, and as they cautiously crept from the hollow, their captain told them that between the drawbridge and the portcullis at this Antwerp gate there stood two small guard-houses, which, as he had discovered before when reconnoitring, were invariably left empty, probably because their close proximity to the walls made the guard careless of them, thinking that no enemy would dare to approach so near. Their own present mission was to discover whether these houses were still empty and unguarded, as they had been hitherto; and if so, to take possession of them, and gradually summon the remainder of the fifty until the whole of the little band was ensconced there. If this could be done, the success of the enterprise would, in his opinion, be secured. For in the morning, so soon as the guard drew up the portcullis, the ambushed fifty would spring out upon them, put them to the sword, and secure possession of the gate. A messenger would be sent immediately to Hohenlo, who was encamped as near to the city as he had dared to approach with his larger force. He would gallop in at the head of his troops, and the city would be theirs. Without regular soldiers, the citizens, taken by surprise in the dark dawn of a winter's day, would be able to do nothing. Bois-le-Duc would fall an easy prey, and there was great hope that Parma's whole scheme would be frustrated.

Cautiously crept this little company of six through

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the shadows of the night. The city walls loomed up before them; the waters of the moat lay gleaming sullenly below. There was no moon, but a few stars twinkled mistily in the sky, and gave just a gleam of light. Nearer and nearer crept the little knot of moving creatures to those small houses just visible to them through the murky darkness. No light shone out from them; no sound of challenge was in the air. With hushed footfall and bated breath they drew nearer and nearer, and found them—empty!

"Now Heaven be praised for a happy beginning!" spoke Captain Kleerhagen, though still in a low voice, as the little party stood within those sheltering walls. "Now to get the remainder of our fifty here to join us.—Joris Van der Hammer, wilt thou be the one to summon them here? Use all silence and discretion, but let them come, and we will divide into two companies, one in either of these walled shelters, and we will wait then for morning light and the opening of the city gate."

Joris gladly undertook the task, and before an hour had passed the whole of the fifty ambushed soldiers had ensconced themselves within these two small guard-houses close to the gate, and lying down upon their cloaks they waited for the tardy dawn.

Before the day had shown itself, save by a gray glimmer in the east, the little band was awake and alert. Each soldier had brought food with him, and a hasty meal was quickly and quietly despatched. Thus refreshed, they girded their arms about them, and looked well to their

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weapons, and then waited with what patience they could command for the first act of the drama upon which so much depended.

When the first sounds of life were heard from behind the heavy gate, a thrill ran through the little company. Captain Kleerhagen was standing with his drawn sword in his hand, close to the door of one of the guard-houses, although hidden in deep shadow. Another officer held a like position on the other side, and the little band, weapon in hand, awaited the action of their chiefs with intense though repressed eagerness.

Dawn was just breaking clear and red as the sound of the creaking made by the drawing up of the portcullis fell upon their ears. The patriots watched in breathless silence the rise of the great barred portal; and when this had been fastened up in position, the guard leisurely sauntered forth to reconnoitre.

It was plain they looked for no foe at their gates. They were laughing and chatting to each other, and swinging their arms to and fro to restore circulation. They had had a cold night-watch to keep, and were glad to think that their time was nearly ended. They little knew how very near was the end of their time of service in this world!

With one quick bound Captain Kleerhagen sprang out from the open portal and drove his sword through the heart of the foremost man of the watch, his soldiers following him in perfect silence, but each dealing a fatal blow as he fell upon his astonished and unprepared antagonist. It

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was a grim work, and it took but a few minutes to accomplish. Every man of the night-watch lay dead or dying upon the ground. The gate of the city was in the hands of the patriots!

With a flushed face and sparkling eyes Captain Kleerhagen turned to his little company.

"Well done, my men!" he cried, as he waved his sword above his head. "Bois-le-Duc is ours; and as our great Count Hohenlo has promised, the spoil of the city shall be to the gallant soldiers who follow him. Go then, some of you, and summon him in haste; tell him that all is well.—Corporal, remain you here with two or three men to hold the gate; and as for us, we will march forward into the city and show them that we are masters here!"

Joris and Otto, fleet of foot and always ready for any such service, had started off to summon the Count and his body of troops lying concealed not far away almost before the sentence was finished; yet the words of Kleerhagen were borne back to them on the wind, and as they ran Joris said anxiously to his brother,—

"I trust they will not act rashly. It had been better to await the coming of the rest of the troops. Nevertheless they be so hard by that we shall doubtless quickly join them. Yet I would that they had not put into the minds of the men that thought of loot and plunder. There will be more work to do ere we can call the city ours. It will be time to tell the men of plunder when it is really won."

"I love not the plunder of our brethren, even though

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they take part with our foes," said Otto. "But yonder lies the army, and here comes a lancer galloping out to meet us. In a few moments more the Count will be in the city."

The young men gave their message, which was received with shouts and cheers. The handsome and dashing Hohenlo sprang upon the back of his big white charger, and galloped off at the head of two hundred horsemen, his golden locks floating in the breeze, his face all aglow with anticipated triumph. Five hundred pikemen on foot clattered after him as fast as they could march; but the main part of the army—two thousand troopers under Colonel Ysselstein—still remained in ignorance of the movements of their companions, as they had halted at a somewhat greater distance from the neighbourhood of the city.

"I trust all will be well," said one brother to the other as they hurried back towards the gate, fearful lest this eagerness in the beginning might prove false policy in the end. But no; all was well. The city had not yet awakened to the fact that deadly peril menaced it. The gate stood open, with the corporal and his two men-at-arms guarding it, and the slain guard lying around still and motionless.

Hohenlo, spurring his snorting horse over the prostrate bodies with that needless brutality which characterized so many of the leaders even of the righteous cause, waved his sword above his head, shouting, "Victory! victory!" And his men, taking up the cry, ran or galloped madly along the quiet streets, echoing the shouts of triumph

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uttered by the Count, and full of thoughts of pillage and plunder.

Joris and Otto made no attempt to join in this mad rush, but followed more slowly in the wake of the pikemen. They had not often been present at the assault of a city, but the words of the Italian kept recurring to them, and they said one to another,—

"Pray Heaven we be not too confident that the day is already ours, and lose our head in this tumult! I like not this way of taking a city. We are too scattered and disordered to meet and repel an attack if it be made. This is not how the Prince of Orange would have led us."

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CHAPTER XII.

A DEAD MAN'S HAND.

"VICTORY!"—"Victory!"—"Gained city!"—"Down with the power of Spain!"—"Death to all traitors to the cause!"—"Victory!"—"Victory!"

The streets were ringing with these shouts. Hohenlo and his horsemen were sweeping through the hardly-awakened town. The terrified citizens were roused from their slumbers by the bursting in of their doors and the savage shouts of greedy soldiers, demanding their money and their treasure. Women and children ran shrieking out of houses, yet knew not whither to run. Enraged though frightened, the citizens were hastily arming themselves, and emerging with faces full of wrath and wonder into the streets full of lancers and pikemen. And as each door was opened some of the soldiers rushed in with shouts and cries to see what plunder there was for them to seize; and thus by degrees the army seemed to melt away and disperse, whilst in the great market-place the citizens commenced to muster with a unanimity that had something threatening in its aspect. So dire was the confusion and so great the tumult that it was impossible to say rightly what was passing; but Joris

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and Otto grew more and more uneasy, for as they took no part in these scenes of plunder, they had time to observe the attitude of the burghers; and Joris, turning to his brother, said at last,—

"Otto, I like it not. This is not generalship—to give a city to pillage before it is taken. These bold men are not conquered yet. See how they gather more and more in the streets, every one of them armed to the teeth! Look at their faces! There is more of rage than fear to be seen in them. I greatly fear there is mischief brewing. It is as the Italian said—the Count is too headstrong and reckless. But to lose all when it is within our grasp is too much! Otto, has word been sent, know you, to Colonel Ysselstein, to come up quickly with his two thousand? I truly fear that these few hundred soldiers, mad with greed and love of plunder, and dispersed hither and thither throughout the town, will make but little stand if these bold citizens once rally for an attack. We ought to have the reserve up and within the gates. Have they been sent to, to hasten hither, knowest thou?"

"I heard none order given," answered Otto; "all were for rushing into the city. Joris, I am fleeter-footed than thou. Shall I myself run and give notice to them that it were well the whole force should be within the walls, and speak of what we have seen? Colonel Ysselstein is a good soldier, and keeps his men well under command. I trow if they were here all would be well."

"Ay, go; go as fast as thy feet will carry thee. If thou canst find a stray horse, so much the better. Go and

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bid them come quickly, for I fear evil will befall us yet. They are shouting 'Victory!' all down the streets, but methinks they are something too confident."

"I will go this instant," answered Otto, who was glad enough to find some errand whereby he might perhaps serve his country; for these scenes of pillage and riot were little to his liking, and his heart misgave him that ill would follow if they did not speedily find themselves supported by their reserves. He sped towards the gate again as fast as his feet could carry him, and as he reached it he was eagerly hailed by the corporal in charge there and his two companions, who asked what was passing in the city.

"The soldiers are mad with loot and plunder," answered Otto, scarcely pausing as he darted past. "I fear me there will be mischief ere long if this go on. I am off to bring in the reserves; they should have had warning before."

Otto was gone before more could be said, and in the distance the shouts of the soldiers, as they rushed hither and thither in their thirst for plunder, faintly reached the ears of the corporal and his comrades.

"Faith, they will rifle the town ere we get a chance of our share of booty," cried the men one to another. "Why should we be the only ones of all the band that are left out when there is spoil to be gotten? By Heaven it shall not be! We will not be cheated thus. We have done our share of duty here. Now it is our turn to join in the sacking of the city. It is in our hands. We will not be defrauded of our rightful plunder."

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Thus talking one to the other, the men grew more discontented and more eager after plunder. The distant yells and shouts of their comrades rose ever louder and louder in their ears.

"There is naught to do here," they said, looking each other in the face, and reading confirmation of their wishes in the eyes of their comrades. "All yon men be dead as door-nails. The reserves will be here in the twinkling of an eye. Otto Van der Hammer runs like the wind, and they will not be slow to follow him when they know the city is ours and has been given up to plunder. Why should we stay here and lose our share? When the two thousand have come our chance will be wonderfully diminished." And as that thought came into their minds they hesitated no longer, but tore away from their post to join in the general scrimmage that was going on in the city.

Meantime Joris, left by his brother in the streets, was anxious to find Count Hohenlo, and try, if it were possible, to communicate some of his fears to him. It seemed to the young soldier that all the world had gone mad, and the leader as much as his followers; but he was more and more convinced that the city was far from being taken, for there was a determined march of well-armed citizens in one direction. Joris followed unnoticed in the wake of three or four hurrying burghers, and as he moved he heard the words they spoke one to another,—

"If they be not already gone, they will serve us in our need right well. The Seigneur de Haultepenne will not leave us to be plundered by these rebel beggars. Our

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Governor has gone forth to try to stop him, and we are summoned under arms to meet him in—"

"Haultepenne!" cried another voice, eagerly interrupting. "What say you of Haultepenne? Is that great warrior within the city now?"

"Unless he has departed with the first of the morning light, he is," was the quick reply. "Know you not that a great train of costly merchandise was sent into the city yesterday?"

"I had heard somewhat of it, but—"

"But not that the Seigneur Haultepenne and some seventy soldiers had accompanied it to insure its safety through the disturbed country? Ah well, but so it was. As I hear, there should be some forty lancers and perhaps the same number of foot-soldiers, all armed and together, about to sally forth from the town, their work being now done. Pray Heaven they be not yet gone! With them to lead us we may yet drive the rabble horde out of the city. Come, let us hasten and see. Let yon greedy rebels glut themselves with plunder in their mad security, Bolduc will teach them a lesson yet! Onward then, all good citizens! We will show them what we can yet do in defence of our honour and our homes!"

Joris heard no more, but dropped back and let the citizens hurry past him. A look of dismay, almost of despair, was on his face.

Well did he know the name of Haultepenne, one of the Spanish king's most famous warriors, a man of the greatest courage and experience. Was he indeed in the

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city, and with a small but gallant and compact band of troopers with him? Joris threw up his hands with a gesture of desperation. True, they had above five hundred soldiers in the town, and the citizens would scarce muster half that force at so brief a notice; but Joris was soldier enough to know how little can be done with men dispersed and bent on loot and plunder when they suddenly find themselves attacked and forced to fight an unexpected foe. With desperation in his heart he turned and flew along the streets in the direction of the loudest sounds and cries. The sun was rising over the town, and lighting up streets full of rioters and their victims. Murder was not in the hearts of the soldiers. These people were their own countrymen, and they wished them no bodily harm. But they had allied themselves with the cause of the Spanish king, and in that way had become their foes, so that to plunder them of their goods seemed but a fair retaliation; and when the spirit of greed is awakened, the sense of mercy and compassion becomes instantly blunted. Therefore, although there was no actual carnage, there were scenes sufficiently harrowing and brutal going on all around—women and children rushing shrieking from their houses, often pursued by coarse ruffians desirous of obtaining some booty from them or of enjoying their fright and dismay.

Joris turned away with loathing from the sights he saw, and as he pursued his rapid way he kept asking every one who looked fit to give a rational answer where Count Hohenlo was to be found. Directed first in this direction

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and then in that, he was some time in coming upon the object of his search; but at last he saw the golden curls of the handsome captain floating behind him as he rode hither and thither with his drawn sword in his hand; and making a dash through the crowd and flinging himself almost beneath the feet of his prancing charger, he succeeded in attracting the attention of the rider.

"How now, boy? Dost want speech of me? Hast come with news?"

Joris and Otto were well known as messengers whenever speed and despatch were required, and had been used by the Count of late in matters of like kind. Therefore he was ready to rein in his horse and hear what Joris had to say, when another youth equally humble might have been ignored at such a moment.

"My Captain, there is trouble coming upon us," said Joris, speaking in a low and rapid tone. "I pray you lose not a moment in summoning your soldiers around you and putting them into a position of defence. In a few moments more we shall be attacked by some well-armed troopers under the Seigneur de Haultepenne. Look round, I pray you, and see if your men are ready to repel a fierce onslaught even from a small force."

Count Hohenlo changed colour, and a flash of dismay came into his eyes.

"Haultepenne—troopers! Boy, art thou dreaming? This town is without a garrison."

"I know that, sir; but its citizens are strong and fierce, and well armed. All they want is a leader, and they

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have found him in the veteran I have named. The Seigneur de Haultepenne, by what I gather, came yesterday into the city escorting a train of merchandise, and some fourscore soldiers with him. I fear me they be still within the walls, and the burghers are hastening to put themselves beneath his command. I only stayed to hear that much, and have since been striving to find you, that I might warn you of the threatened peril. Ah me! I fear my message comes too late. Hark to those sounds!"

The handsome, daring face of Hohenlo turned grim and pale as certain ominous sounds smote upon his ear. All in a moment the wild shouts of victorious triumph were merged in yells of fear, pain, and rage. There was a rattling of musketry, too steady and concentrated to come from the scattered looters, who had many of them thrown away their arms the better to secure their booty, and almost immediately rose cries of terror and rage mingled with the shout which does more to unman soldiers than anything else,—

"Treachery! treachery!—we are betrayed!"

Count Hohenlo, with all his faults, did not lack for courage, and the hint just received from Joris explained to him in a moment what had happened. His triumphant soldiers, who had thought to plunder before they had really taken the city, found themselves confronted by a compact little band commanded by a well-known and much-dreaded general. Terror seized upon them, and the wildest confusion; but their captain hoped to rally them by the influence of his presence and command. He

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knew that their enemies could not be more than a handful compared with the seven hundred men he had himself brought into the city; and riding to and fro, he shouted to his soldiers to fall into order and make a phalanx to resist the coming onslaught, choosing a position which gave decided advantages to him, and instructing his subordinates to muster their men quickly and form up.

He might as well have spoken to the winds of heaven as to his panic-stricken soldiers. Some were for escaping with their load of plunder; others thought only of saving their own lives, and flung down their burdens as they had before flung down their arms, rushing madly along the streets, not knowing, many of them, whither they were going. The angry shouts of their captains had only the effect of increasing the terror and confusion; and though Hohenlo struck more than one man dead on the spot to rally and inspire the rest with his spirit, he only succeeded in alarming them more and increasing the rout tenfold. Already the measured tramp of veteran troops was heard approaching, and words of command in the Spanish tongue proved beyond all possibility of mistake that their redoubtable foe was upon them. The vague terror now became absolute panic. The men were beyond all reason, and fled helter-skelter in all directions. Hohenlo, in a fury of rage, disappointment, and apprehension, set spurs to his horse and dashed off in the direction of the gate through which they had entered with such feelings of triumph only a brief time before, to summon the reserves and crush in the bud this spirited rising of citizens who

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ought to have submitted to be pillaged and robbed without resistance.

Joris, remembering how ineffectually the gate was guarded, set off in the wake of the rider as fast as his feet would carry him; but his progress was impeded by the confusion in the streets, and he quickly lost sight of the white charger, though he continued to push on as fast as possible to the support of the three men who were now of such manifest importance to the little army. For he saw at a glance that if once the citizens became possessed again of the portal, the day would indeed be lost. The reserves would never get in; and the scattered hundreds, mad with terror, who were rushing wildly about in search of escape, quite forgetting in their confusion the direction of the gate, would be leisurely massacred by the Spanish soldiers and the fierce citizens, neither of which party at such a juncture would be likely to show mercy to the freebooters who had been making such havoc of the town.

It would have been well for the patriots had their leader had as much foresight and coolness of judgment as this young soldier. Hohenlo, mad with rage and desperation, and half blind with the speed at which he was urging on his excited horse, dashed through the gate without even observing that it was entirely unguarded; or if he observed he did not heed, and took no step to replace the guard before sallying forth on his errand. Perhaps he thought the reserves close at hand; probably he was in too reckless a mood to think or notice. Be that as it may, he galloped away through the yawning portal, and hardly

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had he passed through before there was a slight movement among the motionless forms of the slain guard lying stiff and ghastly upon the ground, and an old man, fearfully wounded but not actually dead, lifted his head and looked about him.

This man was an old citizen of Bois-le-Duc whose duty it was to let down or to draw up the portcullis. He had been struck down with the rest of the guard, and left for dead; but there was life in him yet, and perhaps the thud of the flying horse-hoofs had helped to rouse him from his stupor, for he looked after Hohenlo, and then slowly crawled to his hands and knees. He gazed around him. His dead companions lay upon the ground, the cold sunlight of a January morning lighted up the whole scene, and there was not a living being in sight save that solitary horseman fleeing as if for his very life.

In the distance shouts and yells proclaimed some great tumult in the city. A gleam of recollection and intelligence lighted up the drawn and ghastly face of the old man, and a look of grim resolution awoke in the dim eyes.

"The Blessed Saints and the Holy Virgin be with me," murmured the old man through his parched lips. "Let me strike one blow against the foe ere I die."

He closed his eyes a moment, either in silent prayer or to summon up resolution to trail his mangled body over the hard stones, and then with many subdued groans he crawled painfully and slowly towards the great portcullis which had so long been his care. Drawing from his belt a short, sharp dagger, he cut the rope that held it in

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position, and in another moment down came hurtling the grim portal, and the old man looked at it with a smile of sardonic joy.

"Once again!" he murmured; "Heaven send me the strength!" And moving with infinite difficulty, he crawled to the other side and severed the remaining rope, cutting it clean through in both cases, so that no one might raise the portal again until fresh ropes had been provided and adjusted.

"Heaven be praised, they are trapped like rats! Holy Mother of God, receive my soul," breathed the old man, lying down again in the dust with his open knife in his hand; and in another moment his eyes glazed over, a quiver passed through his limbs, and he quietly expired.

But the blow inflicted by that dead man's hand was felt through the length and breadth of the Netherlands. For Parma confessed to his royal master that had Bois-le-Duc fallen into the hands of the patriots, he must have abandoned the siege of Antwerp; and had Antwerp been saved, the whole story of the next years had been vastly different. But through another of those inexplicable blunders with which the story of the siege of Antwerp teems, the mad folly of some person in command rendered abortive the most promising and successful undertakings. Bois-le-Duc should by this time have been in the hands of the patriots; they had surprised it, and it had lain practically at their mercy. Their mad folly had caused them to make a fatal blunder, and now—

Joris came dashing up to the gate, panting and breath-

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less, only five minutes after Hohenlo had dashed through; and what did he find? The guard gone, the place solitary and silent; but the portcullis down—an old man lying dead beside it with an open dagger-like knife in his hand, a grim smile upon his dead face telling to Joris's heated imagination its own story of triumph and revenge.

"God in His mercy help us!" cried the youth when he saw the state of affairs, and the hopelessness of raising that great iron barrier; "they will drive them into this trap and slay them like sheep in the shambles. And what will it boot if our two thousand come to our aid, when they be on one side of this barrier and we on the other?"

And then Joris looked about for some way of escape for himself. He was no coward, as he had proved a hundred times before; but to stay here to be slain in an inglorious rout was no proof either of courage or devotion. He could serve his country perchance by his life; his death within the walls of Bois-le-Duc would profit nothing. He was sick at heart with disappointment and grief, and bitterly, bitterly outraged by the utter lack of discipline shown by the leaders of this expedition. He was ashamed at that moment of his own country and his own countrymen. What wonder that the far-seeing Italian had sneeringly prognosticated failure? It seemed now as though the war were nothing but one long blunder.

But there was no time now for moralizing; the yells and screams, shouts and curses, proclaimed the fact that the attacking-party of an hour before was flying helter-skelter for the gate. In a few moments there would be

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terrible carnage there; the slaughter of the guard at daybreak would be amply avenged. Joris gave one quick look round him, and darted up one of the turrets that flanked the gate. It gave him access to the roof of the place, from whence an outlook along the road could be obtained. Far in the distance a cloud of dust bespoke the approach of the reserves; but they had come just half-an-hour too late.

Below, some thirty or forty feet, lay the moat, gleaming sullen and black. Joris was an expert gymnast and a strong swimmer. His resolution was soon taken. Putting off his heavier accoutrements, he sprang boldly off the turret and into the water, swimming easily across, and reaching the other bank in good time to see the advancing troops gallop up to the gate, Count Hohenlo and Colonel Ysselstein being foremost of the mounted band who led the reserves.

They advanced with shouts, as was the way of the fiery Count; but as they suddenly reined in before this unexpected obstruction, their faces grew dark and blank.

Within the gate they heard the shouts and yells of the hunted soldiers, as they were being driven mercilessly to their death; and there were they on the other side, helpless to move hand or foot in their assistance, that grim iron grating standing between—an impassable barrier that needed other weapons than any they had brought with them to break it down.

Truly it was a fearful moment for the patriot army. They had come in the hopes of an easy victory, and now

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some hundreds of their best troops were being helplessly massacred within the walls of the city they had been looting and triumphing over but a brief while before. Gnashing his teeth in impotent fury, the Count turned upon Joris, who had effected a landing, and was trying to rescue from the muddy ooze the arms he had flung over before he made his own spring.

"At least thou art safe, boy; thou art not caught in yon accursed trap. How has this misfortune chanced? How came it that the gate fell into the hands of the enemy?"

"I know nothing of that—I can but guess; but I fear me the guard deserted their post in the hope of gain and plunder. When you rode through, methinks they must already have fled, for I was not long behind, and they had then gone. There was no sign of them, and the ropes of yon portcullis had been cut through by one of the guard we had left for dead."

"A curse upon him! a murrain upon this city! Was ever day so untoward! Great Heavens, how shall we go back to tell the tale? I would almost rather have been cut to pieces on the other side! Ah, my brave men, your bravery will serve you little now! A plague upon those crafty burghers! the foul fiend fly away with every one of them!"

It was easy to curse the citizens and evil fortune, but the sting of the thing lay in the consciousness of his own folly, as he very well knew. Joris stood by, sad at heart and scarce able to rejoice in his own escape from those

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shambles, so ashamed did he feel of the egregious blunder which had caused the disaster of the day. Victory actually within their grasp, and their triumph to be turned into disgrace! It was heart-rending and shameful. He scarce knew how he should go home and tell the tale; and yet Antwerp must learn how the day had gone.

Few indeed of those who had rushed into the city at daybreak, shouting victory, lived to return to their comrades. A few escaped as Joris had done, many others were drowned whilst attempting a like feat in other parts of the walls, and many more were cut to pieces before they could make the desired spring. Captain Kleerhagen had a wonderful escape, for he sprang from off the roof of Holy Cross church, whither he had fled, and with all his armour upon him; but he succeeded in getting safe to shore. It was a mournful and dejected band that turned back at last to Gertruydenberg. There was no hope now of taking the place by surprise, and to attempt a siege was hopeless. Covered with shame and sick at heart with vexation, the leaders led back their troops whence they had come, to hear the men murmur amongst themselves that these things did not happen when the Prince of Orange was alive. Such statements were broad, and might not be altogether endorsed by fact—mistakes and misfortunes are always possible when great undertakings are on foot; but there was sufficient truth in the stricture to leave a sting, and Count Hohenlo was perhaps more absolutely humiliated than he had ever been in his life before. Well for Antwerp would it have been had he

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taken to heart the lesson he should have learned that day before the walls of Bois-le-Duc!

But at least Joris and Otto had both escaped, and yet the peril of the former had been great. They were told off to convey the ill tidings to Antwerp, and pursued their way thither with heavy hearts, wondering how the news would be taken, and whether they would ever be the bearers of good tidings to that city.

They entered it at length after dusk, finding the darkness the best time for escaping the vigilance of the Spanish outposts stationed all around. To the Burgomaster first, then to their own home, must they repair; and before an hour had passed all the city knew that the expedition from which so much had been expected had been a lamentable failure.

"Failure we could have borne, but this savours of disgrace!" said Lionel sternly, as the news was discussed at home. "It is too much that we should be made the laughing-stock of the world! To fling away the cause for which a hundred thousand lives have been sacrificed for the sake of the paltry spoil of a single town! Faugh! the thought sickens one! Well does old Gianibelli say that there was not an ounce of brains in the head of any of our leaders! Oh for one hour of the Great William! What would not he have said to such an ending as this!"

There were consternation and sorrow in the city that night, and nowhere more than in Hooch Straet—the wonderful escape of Joris, where so many in like case had

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fallen victims, being the one ray of brightness which lightened their grief.

But one pair of fierce eyes gleamed triumphantly as the news was told, and there was one heart in that house which beat high with exultation and cruel delight. Diego took little pains to conceal the scornful triumph in his heart from those by whom he was surrounded; but few had time or thought to spare for his insolent words or exultant looks, which Alphonso strove in vain to check.

Diego held that no gratitude or courtesy was due from him to the "greasy burgher folk" who had befriended him. It was honour enough for them to sit at table with nobles of Spain. If they wished him to veil his sentiments in order to please them—well, they might wish it. He would as soon think of flying as of considering their feelings.

But nobody noticed greatly what the sullen Spaniard said or did, and perhaps this indifference galled him more than he would have confessed. It was considered a Christian duty to behave with clemency towards the prisoners they had befriended, and Diego was still lame, whilst Alphonso was only very gradually recovering the strength which had been so utterly prostrated. Neither was he in condition to endure with impunity the hardships of a prison life; and the family who had so long sheltered them had never given up the feeling that some day, should misfortune befall them in the capture of one of their party, they might exchange prisoners, and get their loved one back by means of one of these captives. So that there

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was policy as well as generosity in the motive which prompted Lionel and his father-in-law to retain the persons of the youths, whose presence there had already been forgotten by the authorities; and though Diego sneered and flouted at the thought of being a guest of an Antwerp citizen, he knew well that he had much to be thankful for in his present quarters. He now fared well every day of his life. And none knew better than he how much depended upon regular and sufficient nourishment. If scarcity became greater in the city later on, a Spanish prisoner would hardly be like to get more than enough to keep body and soul together.

But gratitude was not a prevailing characteristic with Diego, and to-night he took no pains to conceal his insolence. The party for the most part had no thought to spare for him; but there was one member of the household who noted his every word and action, and presently the youngest daughter of the Van der Hammer family drew near to the warm corner which was generally selected by their guest for his own place.

Coosje had been rather fascinated from the first by the sullen, haughty Diego; but it was by no means a fascination of attraction. She felt something as a bird might do with the gleaming eyes of the snake upon it; and yet that simile hardly applies either, for she did not fear the dark-browed man one whit, nor had he ever appeared to take any note of her presence. He held aloof from all in insolent arrogance, and unless directly addressed by one of the heads of the house, spoke no word to any save

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Alphonso. All this was rather fascinating to watch—at least so thought this little maiden, who had seldom had any new study of human character to amuse her, and who thought that this Spaniard was certainly the strangest being she had ever come across.

After the supper that evening, as she moved about her daily duties as usual, she passed by him from time to time, and each time he was striving to get Alphonso to join with him in his insolent strictures on Dutchmen for their military prowess, for their blunders and their blindness. Alphonso was not responsive, but that did not check Diego's flow of words, and as he elected to speak in Dutch instead of Spanish, it was plain that he intended others than his companion to hear. Passing by him for the fourth or fifth time, and still hearing the same sort of language, she paused for a moment with her cloth in her hand, and looked straight up at him with a little sparkle in her dark eyes.

"Pray, tell me, Señor, for my instruction, are those Spanish manners—the manners of which we ignorant Dutch folk hear so much?"

He was so astonished at the question that he remained silent. Keen and quick-witted, he saw in a moment the implied rebuke, and felt very much as a tiger might do if a dove were to set upon and attack it.

"For if so," continued Coosje, very clearly and quietly, "I think we homely people of Antwerp may be thankful we have different manners here. We need not envy the blue blood of the nobles of Spain."

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She passed on without another word or look, or without waiting for a reply. Diego bit his lip, and a dark flush crept into his cheek; but he made no response, and Alphonso remarked in their own tongue,—

"A good rebuke indeed, Diego! I marvel thou canst disgrace thy manhood by such—"

"Have a care, Alphonso; I am none too patient with this ache in my bones and this hateful cold. I will not be hectored by thee."

"Thou wouldst rather be rebuked by our hosts! I call it shame that thou dost treat them so."

"I rebúked, and by a chit of a child!"

"Child or no, she did rebuke thee; and thou didst well merit it. Have a care that thou give not cause for it again; I think she would not spare thee."

Diego said no more, and subsided into silence for the remainder of the evening; but he kept shooting sidelong glances at Coosje and her spinning-wheel during the time that remained to them, and sometimes as she raised her eyes from her task she caught one of his dark flashing glances.

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CHAPTER XIII.

GIANIBELLI'S PLAN.

"DID I not say so? Fools! fools! fools! O ye Dutchmen, when will ye learn wisdom? Making sure of plunder when the city is not taken; stopping the victualling of your own city for the sake of a few paltry crowns! O ye fools of Antwerpers and Dutchmen! ye do not deserve that any should help you. And yet you shall have one more chance—one more! I will save the city for you, if ye have but the sense to accept salvation."

These words were spoken in the little den of the Italian mechanician, and Malcolm and Maurice were eagerly listening. Something of the thoughts seething in the busy brain of this man of genius was known to both the youths by this time; but he had never fully declared his project, and he was not one who could be questioned at will.

But curiosity was burning high in the hearts of the young men and of the old man's daughter, and they pressed closer round the stove beside which Gianibelli sat, their eyes eagerly fixed upon the keen face of the animated man of invention. From time to time there were moments

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when the mood of speech came upon him, and it seemed as though this mood were coming now. His dark eyes scintillated in their deep caverns, and his thin brown hands twitched nervously. He looked not at his daughter, nor at any of the little group around him. His eyes were fixed upon the dim light of the small lamp on the table—not the strong light he used for his work; oil was too precious now to be burnt save with care. At all ordinary times a little rushlight was made to serve for the needs of the humbler people of the place. Antwerp was at last beginning to feel the pinch of the blockade.

For the great general's much-sneered-at bridge was now an accomplished fact. The bridle had been put upon the wild, swirling river, and neither the winter storms nor the great ice-floes had served to hinder that wonderful piece of engineering skill. Backwards and forwards across this mighty roadway tramped the legions of Spain. From afar the awe-stricken burghers of Antwerp had watched the triumphant pageant which commemorated the opening of this great bridge. No vessel could now come up or down. No daring Zeeland skipper could reach the city were he to be paid for his wares their weight in gold. Shut in indeed was the hapless town—shut in by this mighty bridge, and encompassed by forts garrisoned by implacable foes. Scantily victualled, owing to their own blind folly; the great Kowenstyn Dike, the possession of which would have saved the city, passed into the hands of the enemy through their own mad blindness; foiled in their most dashing and gallant feats of arms by the reck-

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less carelessness of their leaders—small wonder was it that the more thoughtful amongst the citizens had almost lost heart, and felt that with so much against them it was a hopeless task trying to stave off the doom of the city, when so great a genius as Alexander Farnese had pledged himself to the task of capture.

And to-day had come the news of the capitulation of Brussels.

Gallantly had that starving city held out so long as there had been any prospect of success from Antwerp. But the completion of the bridge had quenched the last spark of hope they had ever felt; and the brave city had submitted to Parma on as favourable terms as could be looked for, though not before numbers of its inhabitants had actually perished of starvation.

All these misfortunes, coming fast one upon another, went far to try the courage of the people of Antwerp. The disaster at Bois-le-Duc was very keenly felt, because it savoured of disgrace as well as of misfortune. It was well known by this time that Parma himself had said the taking of that city would have forced him to relinquish the siege of Antwerp. When this fact was actually realized, a perfect thrill of indignation and horror went through the town. Here were they exposed during the rigours of the winter months to the horrors of this protracted siege, and all because that mad and reckless Hohenlo had literally flung away a victory practically won, by his headstrong folly and wildness.

It was a thing the citizens could not forget or forgive

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and scarce a day went by without some bitter words being spoken in high places against the reckless soldier. Sainte Aldegonde went about with a troubled face, and when the Councils met had little to say. All the city was in doubt and perplexity; and alone of all men there, this gleaming-eyed Italian seemed to see a ray of hope.

"My father," said Veronica softly, as they sat silent about him, and watched the play of light and shadow over his mobile face, "what is it that you will do to save the city from her fate?"

"I will annihilate that great bridge," answered the old man, speaking slowly with shining eyes. "I will in one moment cause that it shall be no more. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, shall that mighty structure, which has taken all these months to build, be swept away like a wreath of smoke. Puff! it is gone. There is not a trace left behind. The great river rolls along unimpeded. The fleets of Zeeland come sailing up to the city walls with their loads of corn and wine. Consternation and fear reign in Parma's camp; but we in Antwerp shout and sing. Ah, I see it all—I see it all! And the work is Gianibelli's!"

The old man was making quick, excited gestures in the air, as he did in moments of excitement. His eyes were full of fire. Nobody spoke. When he was in this mood it was sometimes better to let him alone, and he would gradually unfold his thoughts of his own accord.

After a few moments of tense silence, during which his listeners scarcely dared to breathe, he spoke again, bending

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forward, resting his chin upon his clasped hands, and gazing more intently than ever into the dim flame of the little rushlight, as though there he read the future.

"I see it all!" he said in low tones, little above a whisper, "I see it all—the dark night, the sleeping city, the black, swirling waters rolling past the walls, and down, down towards yon great bridge! I see it all—all! And yet—stop! what are yon great silent monsters slowly crawling along down, down, down upon that bridge, floating so softly and so silently, neither propelled by oars nor carried by sail? What are they? what are they?"

He paused as though for an answer, and Malcolm hazarded a very low reply.

"Those are the device of the Italian wizard for the destruction of the great bridge."

An odd gleam, something between triumph and malice, lighted for a moment the wizened face of the old man.

"The wizard—ay, the wizard of Antwerp! That is the name by which fools call the only man they have ever seen who has brains enough to fill a pigeon's egg. Wizard! Everything beyond their bovine wits is magic and witchcraft to them. Ay, the device of the wizard! It is well called. Let them come and watch with us. They shall see what the might of the wizard shall accomplish this night."

The rushlight burned very, very dim; the dull red glow from the stove gave almost equal light. The atmosphere seemed charged with some electric force. The strange mood of the weird old man was exercising a peculiar

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power over his audience. They too seemed to be standing watching the dark river flowing from the city towards the bridge, and to see what was desired of them as the "wizard" continued his discourse.

"Look! there be three great monsters—black, shapeless, and dead silent—three great marinerless vessels leaving the city and slipping slowly and silently down the dark, dark river. Do you see them? Good! Then look again and see beyond them, nearer to the bridge. What are those faintly luminous specks upon the water? They look like a crowd of glow-worms silently stealing along. There! did you see that? A flash and a bright light for a moment. And then the ghost-like procession moves ever onward and downward. The camp of the Spaniards is alive. The alarm is given. Soldiers come hurrying out from their huts and tents. The bugle sounds an alarm; and the great Prince himself, ever the first on the spot in moments of danger, comes hurrying on to the bridge to see what manner of phantoms these be. Great Alexander! I pray thy pardon for thy life that must be forfeit. Thou art better than all these bovine herds within the walls. Fain would I have been with thee and not against thee in this matter. But thou must suffer for the arrogance and blindness of thy nation and of thy royal master. I swore an oath when I turned my back on Spain that I would be avenged one day for the slights and insults I had there received. Mine hour is now come! My revenge is well-nigh accomplished; and thou, O great Alexander—thou and thy choicest troops must be the sacrifice."

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The old man paused in his strange apostrophe, spreading out his hands as if to implore pardon, though all the while in the sunken eyes there was shining the light of a great triumph. A spell seemed to have fallen upon his listeners. They were unconscious of their surroundings—unconscious of the little bare room in which they were sitting. They saw with the eyes of the old man, and heard only the words he spoke in that strange hissing whisper. After a moment or two of deep silence, which seemed to last an hour, he took up his word again.

"They are all there—general and soldiers, and the choicest flower of Spanish chivalry—all crowding upon the bridge to watch these phantom lights, and marvel what they be and whence they come. Fear is for a moment in their hearts lest some ill be menacing them; but the little crafts creep hither and thither harmlessly, and terror is turned to laughter and jeering. And all the while in the black darkness beyond, unseen for the smoky glare of these little vessels, come creeping nearer and nearer the three slumbering monsters, who are slowly, slowly, slowly bearing down upon that bridge. None see them, none hear them. They are all laughing to scorn the 'Antwerp fireworks,' fit to scare children withal. But the general keeps his place on the bridge, alert and watchful, in case of surprise.

"There is a shout raised by the soldiers along the bank that a bigger fire-ship is coming. A dull red glow begins to emanate from the foremost of the silent down-coming monsters. This is something different from the light skiffs,

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as all see; but they are not afraid. 'My bridge will not easily fire,' says the great Alexander, with calm confidence. God save his soul! those be the last words he will ever speak. Hark! there is a crash that rends the very heavens—a glare that flames from end to end of the land—the sound as of the rending of hell's mouth and the loosing of ten hundred thousand devils! The air is filled with smoke, but not with smoke alone—with huge stones, with slabs of solid marble, with harpoons, with ploughshares, with every deadly missile the heart of man can devise. And again, what is that? Another crash as loud as before. Again another! And now, indeed, none can breathe the air. It is full of flame and sulphur; it is hell itself let loose upon the earth! We must wait, we must watch; none may dare venture anigh that fearful spot yet. After the long hurtling of deadly missiles comes a dead, deep silence. Where are the voices of yon ten thousand soldiers? Where is the sound of laughter and mockery? Where the word of cool command even in the midst of deadly peril? Silenced—silenced for ever! Stop—let us wait. The thick vapour-wreaths are slowly rising. Anon we may enter that fearful region of desolation and destruction. See there—what are those? You would scarce know. It is a fearful sight, those mangled corpses twisted together like adders in a nest. Where is the great bridge that an hour ago put a curb upon the tossing river, and made a way for the legions of Spain to tramp to and fro? Where is it gone? Go look for it! Ay, ye shall look, ye blind fools of citizens—ye shall seek

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it, but ye shall find it not. The river is rushing onwards to the sea, carrying on her broad bosom huge fragments of the mighty wreck. The Zeelanders beyond, waiting and watching in their boats for news, shall know by this token that the bridge is no more, and shall come triumphantly sailing their vessels through this murky region of dead corpses up to the city walls. And Antwerp shall make merry and rejoice. Antwerp shall go forth to see the great sight. She shall rise up even as the beleaguered city of old, and go forth to the camp of the enemy, and shall find that they be all dead corpses. Ay, and thus shall the great siege of Antwerp end; thus shall Philip of Spain see his treasured schemes brought to naught, his choicest soldiers and greatest general slain! His army and his power shall at once be annihilated. And thus will Gianibelli be avenged!"

The old man threw up his arms in a wild gesture of triumphant rage. He had worked himself up into a strange passion of excitement and fury, and the excitement had communicated itself to his listeners. Maurice's ardent imagination had taken fire instantly. He saw everything as the Italian saw it—could scarcely believe the picture so vividly called up before his mind's eye was all an illusion; he felt as though he had actually witnessed the destruction of the great bridge. Whilst Malcolm, if less vividly impressed by the mental picture thus conjured up, was eagerly sanguine that some such attempt as this, if left in the hands of the wily and ingenious Italian, might indeed bring about some such wonderful deliverance for his city,

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even though it might not be quite so complete as the one pictured by Gianibelli in his wild enthusiasm.

The spell was broken for the moment by the sudden extinction of the dim light, which Veronica hastened to replace, and then she spread the table with their homely and rather scanty fare, and invited the guests to partake of what they had to offer.

The two visitors sat down with them, though eating little, and as the meal proceeded they talked eagerly together of the projected plan.

Gianibelli's weird mood had now passed, but not the disposition to talk. In answer to Malcolm's questions he plainly said that if the city authorities would give him a free hand in this matter, he would undertake the destruction of the bridge, and consent to lose his own head if he failed—glad to pay that forfeit since he knew he could accomplish what he was eager and willing to undertake, if he had but the requisite materials to work with.

"If they would but give me one quarter the money they are spending on yon monster vessel, which will prove the biggest of all Antwerp's big blunders, albeit not so mischievous a one as some," said the old man, "I would undertake that the bridge shall not stand a single day after my preparations are complete. But oh, the folly of your councils and your counsellors! Did Solomon but live in these days, he would soon learn that in the multitude of counsellors there is unspeakable folly and blindness. They will vote half a kingdom to some senseless project of their own, which will be useless or worse than useless when it is

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complete; but let some wise man lay before them a scheme for the easy destruction of the bridge and the termination of the war, and they will doubtless laugh it to scorn!"

"They must not! they shall not!" cried Malcolm earnestly. "Signor, come back with us to-night, and lay all these matters before my brother Lionel. He will then see that you have speech with the Burgomaster, and so shall the matter come before the Council. It cannot be that they will be altogether blind and deaf. Shut in as we now are, our condition is well-nigh desperate, unless one of two things be done—the piercing of the Kowenstyn Dike, or the destruction of Parma's bridge. All the city is beginning to know this now. The dike bristling with Spanish guns and crowded with Spanish pikemen is an object of fear to all. An attack there would be made at fearful odds; but these fire-ships—this instantaneous destruction of the bridge, and that without peril to human life—oh, it cannot fail to appeal to the sense and reason of all! Come and unfold all the plan to my brother; he has more influence with our Burgomaster than his position warrants. Let him hear all that has been in your head these many days. He will strive that the city shall give you a hearing and a fair trial."

Gianibelli was willing enough to push this matter forward now. Ever since the bridge had been commenced he had been turning over and over in his ingenious mind some plan for its destruction—some plan that should bring his own name into estimation before all the world as one of the wonder-workers there. A boundless ambition burned

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within him. He had all the nervous thirst for fame that so often accompanies great abilities of this description. He was convinced that if he were but listened to he could effect a revolution in the world's history, and his constant disappointments in getting a hearing, or the incredulity and scorn with which his projects were received, had imbittered and soured his nature. He was by this time a regular cynic, and would have sold his wares to the highest bidder, without regard to anything but his own advantage. He had no love for the patriot cause for its own sake, and felt an unbounded contempt for the blunders of the ill-ruled citizens; but here he was, shut in in Antwerp, and to them or to none could he make known his ambitious projects. He had long ago set his heart on striking a blow at the arrogant Spaniards, and it seemed indeed as though his hour were about to come.

Lionel and his father-in-law listened with great attention as the Italian unfolded his scheme. Everything had been most carefully thought out. The inventor had even discovered an improvement in gunpowder, and was prepared to make himself that which was to be used in his explosive ships. He had drawn wonderful diagrams to demonstrate how the vessels were to be made ready for their diabolical mission, and how the crater of what was to be nothing more or less than a miniature volcano was to be prepared. He and an ingenious clockmaker of the name of Bory had constructed elaborate instruments by which the mass of explosives could be set alight at an appointed time. Every detail had been set down with

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the utmost precision; and in theory the plan was so perfect that Lionel felt at once that the scheme should be submitted to the authorities without loss of time. Misfortunes had come fast upon Antwerp of late, and the news of the capitulation of Brussels, though not exactly unexpected, had produced a bad effect upon the citizens. There was danger that the apathy of despair would fall upon them, and that they would cease to struggle against the iron hand that was closing round them. The genius showed by Parma in the construction of this bridge in the teeth of the winter storms had engendered in the minds of some of the people a sense of consternation and hopelessness. It seemed useless to fight against such a man as that. But to Lionel and his father-in-law it appeared as though he might meet his match in the genius of this Italian mechanician.

Lionel took the diagrams and the instructions of the mechanician, and promised to see the Burgomaster the next day, and let him know what he thought of the scheme. Sainte Aldegonde had a mind superior to petty incredulity —the incredulity of ignorance. It might be difficult to get the Council to believe that one single man could annihilate the great bridge in a moment of time, but the Burgomaster might believe, and he had at least nominal rule on the Council. He had been outvoted again and again by the blind obstinacy of the burghers, but perhaps in this time of extremity they would listen to the counsels of reason.

Gianibelli's demands were not exorbitant. He asked

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for three ships out of the city fleet, ships that he had selected for certain properties they possessed as the most suitable to his purpose—the *Orange*, the *Post*, and the *Golden Lion*. Then for his smaller fleet he asked for fifty scows—flat-bottomed boats of a peculiar build—and a large quantity of explosives and of missiles, blocks of stone and projectiles of every kind, with which to fill his vessels and insure the accomplishment of his deadly purpose.

Lionel was greatly struck by the ingenuity of the scheme, and by the absolute thoroughness with which every detail had been worked out. It was not the chimera of a dreamer, but the closely-reasoned plan of a practical man, knowing exactly the value of the things he used and the effect to be produced by certain agencies.

"It might save the city," quoth Lionel when the Italian was gone; and he and Van der Hammer, both men who knew much of ships and their power of service, sat far into the night with the plans before them, going over the whole scheme again, and finding it each time more comprehensible and more satisfactory than the last.

It was an exciting day in Hooch Straet when Lionel sallied forth with the roll of papers beneath his arm to seek speech with the Burgomaster. Anything that brought a ray of hope, anything that gave promise of some termination to that long siege, was eagerly welcomed by all within the walls. The only faces that were not brighter than usual were those of the two Spanish youths. Alphonso looked troubled and anxious, as well he might, feeling that if this thing were to become a reality his general, his

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brother and comrades, and the flower of the army might be annihilated in a moment of time. Diego's brow was black as night, and he moved restlessly to and fro, swearing softly beneath his breath, and looking fiercely at any person who spoke of the contemplated undertaking.

It was impossible to keep the knowledge of it from the two prisoner-guests. The severity of the weather obliged them now to be almost all the day with the family, and Alphonso was taking to this strange family life with ease and even pleasure. He and the juffrouw Van der Hammer were wonderfully good friends, and he looked after her little comforts with a courtesy that was almost filial. Diego sneered at him in vain. He was not to be laughed out of the position he had taken up, and the whole party had become warmly attached to him by now.

Lionel came back at mid-day without the papers.

"They are to be laid before the Board of Schepens on the morrow, and Gianibelli is to attend to give such explanations as they may want. The Burgomaster is mightily taken with the idea, and hopes it will be successful—has every hope of it. He would grant the ships at once, but must not without the consent of the Board. Heaven send they do not blunder more, and refuse what is so modest a demand! It scarce seems possible they should. What use are our ships to us now? When they might well have been used against the builders of the bridge, we slumbered peacefully, thinking that France would come and save us. Men's hearts are getting weary now with waiting for that help, and for mine own part I never thought it would

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come. Better let the Italian use our vessels than leave them idle here. I hope and trust there will be no grudging. Men should remember how the preservation of those droves of cattle on the plains has cost Antwerp ten thousand times their value!"

"The Holy Saints blind their eyes and send them strong delusion, and let them deny everything the wily Italian asks!" quoth Diego beneath his breath. "They have fought so well on our side heretofore, I scarce think they will desert us now."

Coosje looked quickly up. Diego was sitting near her, and she alone heard his words. Of late he had generally taken up a position rather near her seat, and from time to time he would strive by some such exclamation to win a word or a look from her. It was an amusement he was beginning to indulge in, scarcely knowing wherein the pleasure lay. He met her glance now with a mocking light in his eyes. Coosje looked straight at him, and said,—

"It is the folly of our own citizens, not the interference of your saints, Señor, that brings this poor city into trouble. If we had a ruler amongst us like our great dead Prince, these blunders would not be made."

"No; the devil carried him off in the nick of time. Would it had happened ten years before! Then this accursed war would be at an end, and we should be safe in our own land."

"It is an accursed war!" answered Coosje with spirit. "It is accursed because it is a war of tyranny and cruelty, and its object is vile and hateful. But it is you and not

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we who make that war, and make it what it is. If your King had been true to his pledges it would never have begun. He is false, and we are free from his yoke, and will fight for our liberty to the death."

The flash in her eyes gratified him somehow. He liked the quick, keen spirit of the little Dutch girl. He attempted no scornful or angry reply, but contented himself by a short laugh not quite so grim as usual.

There was excitement all that day in the city. It had got abroad that some scheme was on foot for the destruction of Parma's bridge, and rumours of all sorts were flying from mouth to mouth. Some said one thing about it and some another, but there was very little real knowledge of the matter. When, however, the name of Gianibelli was breathed there was a visible diminution in popular enthusiasm.

"The Wizard!" people said one to another in low tones; "I like him not. He is a foreigner. He hates us and our nation. I have heard that said a thousand times. I would not trust him. He will undo us if we do. Have no dealings with witchcraft; that is Bible rule. Better wait till the King of France comes to our aid than trust to such a one as he."

The feeling of distrust and suspicion grew fast. Before the Board of Magistrates met, there was an uneasy sense abroad in the city that some subtle peril threatened them; and when the Board assembled together, there were many who had almost made up their minds beforehand that whatever proposal was to be made should be sternly negatived.

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The Burgomaster made a fine speech, in which the nature of the proposed measure was laid before the Council; and Gianibelli at his request followed it up by a further explanation, and demonstrated to his own satisfaction and that of the most intelligent men there that there was every reasonable prospect of destroying the bridge, if he had only what he asked allowed him.

It would perhaps have been better had the Italian been dismissed after making his speech, before the discussion came on; for as one after another the ignorant burghers rose with some ponderous objection which betrayed an absolute lack of comprehension of the subject, and ignorance of the nature of the measures proposed, the quick-tempered old man lost his self-control, and rising suddenly to his feet, let loose a volley of excited language, in which argument and abuse were freely mingled, and succeeded so well in convincing all hearers of his madness and hatred to their nation that the cause was lost almost from the first. Incredulous of the promised wonders, ignorant alike of the mechanism of the clockwork and the power of the explosives, they laughed to scorn the notion of destroying this great bridge so easily. The furious tirade launched upon them by the inventor served only to strengthen their opposition; and after something very like an open brawl, the Burgomaster at length succeeded in restoring a semblance of order, though not before Gianibelli had stridden away in high dudgeon, vowing never to raise a finger on behalf of the ungrateful and dunder-headed citizens.

When he was gone Sainte Aldegonde strove his best, by

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his quiet reasoning and personal influence, to get the Board to reconsider its determination; but the burghers were thoroughly roused and angry, and were vehemently set against the scheme. Still they did respect their Burgomaster, and were not entirely callous to the reminder of the number of blunders already made during the siege. When he represented to them that he believed the refusal of this project would be as great a blunder as any that had gone before, they began to look uncomfortable; and at last some person suggested that they should make a compromise.

To give the mad Italian three of their best war-vessels was mere folly, he argued, carrying the greater number of the Magistrates with him as he spoke; but since the worshipful Burgomaster thought that something might come of an attempt to blow up the bridge, let two inferior vessels be allowed for the purpose, together with a number of lighter craft—those to be selected that were growing old and unserviceable; and let this strange wizard-man see what he could do with them. Since he was desirous of preparing his own powder, he might be allowed what he wanted in the way of explosives and projectiles; and they would then see how far he was able to carry out his threats of wholesale destruction. If his hopes were well founded, these materials ought to suffice; for a breach in the bridge would answer almost as well as its wholesale destruction, if the two fleets of Antwerp and Zeeland were awaiting the result, one on either side of the barrier. Whilst the Spaniards remained stunned and horrified by

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what had occurred, the two fleets acting in concert would tear away the remainder of the barricade; and they would want to hold all their good ships in readiness for that emergency, and it would be a thousand pities to be robbed of three of their best. The two inferior and unseaworthy vessels that were to be offered to Gianibelli would not be missed, and for such a purpose ought to be amply sufficient.

This speech was received with applause by nearly all the Magistrates. Sainte Aldegonde would fain have answered more liberally the demand of the Italian mechanician; but he had only one vote upon the Board, and the voice of the majority carried the day. There was a certain show of reason in using bad instead of good ships for such a purpose; and the burghers could hardly be blamed, perhaps, for refusing to put unlimited faith in a man who abused them so roundly and expressed such unmitigated scorn for themselves and all their doings.

"We are doomed to blunders, it would seem," remarked Lionel, as he returned home with the news; "albeit things went better in the end than at the beginning seemed possible. It was a blunder to let that firebrand hear his measure pulled in pieces by those heavy Schepens, who blundered themselves at every turn; and they again have blundered in being parsimonious when it would have been well to be generous. Still, with even thus much material, I think something considerable may be done. The only question is, will Gianibelli condescend to go to work for men who trust him so ill? There is a fiend of pride and

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petulance in the man, and it is well known that a genius is ill to deal with. I will go to him myself when his anger has had time to cool, and see what may be done with him; but I fear me there may be trouble."

Malcolm nodded his head gravely.

"Ay, verily! He came home storming that he would never lift a finger to help this accursed city; but Veronica is striving to quiet him. His moods though violent are short-lived when his passion is much stirred. Perchance by to-morrow he may think differently. We will strive to bring him to another mind. Antwerp must not lose this last hope!"

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CHAPTER XIV.

A DARING SWIM.

"FATHER, dear father, do but listen! Nay, turn not away from our words. Let these blind and foolish men see what you can accomplish, even with the half of what should have been yours. Let them not say that it was all a mad illusion. Father, *padre mio*, all the world will stand amazed at this proof of your power! With everything so beautifully arranged, why give it all up because these blundering burghers are so densely blind? There are others who see—there be many eager to forward the work; why not show to these what may be done? Why not show to the unbelievers the great things thou canst accomplish? All Antwerp will stand amazed if thou wilt but try thy power."

"Verily the maid is right," said Lionel. "Good Master Gianibelli, I have come to tell thee with what deep regret the noble Burgomaster and many of our best men regard the decision of the Board. It is an ill thing in days of war to live under the rule of the many. We want a tyrant in this city—a tyrant with an iron hand and a brain to match—one who could rule these hydra-headed

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boards of governors, and reduce them to order and obedience. But, alas! we have none such here. Our Burgomaster has the will but not the power. The power rests with the majority, and that majority is—"

"The assembly of fools, blind fools and idiots!" flashed the old man, with a wrathful gleam in his sunken eyes. It was the first word Lionel had heard him speak; for hitherto he had been sunk in sullen, brooding silence, and had returned no answer to the pleadings of Veronica or the arguments of Malcolm and Lionel, who had both come to see if they could not persuade him to reconsider his decision and go to work with the amount of poor material offered him by the niggardly Council. His passion of the previous evening had had time to subside, and the sullen mood had replaced the wild fury of the first hours of disappointment. Malcolm knew this mood well, as did Veronica also, and knew that he was not easy to deal with in it; so that both were glad to see that flash of anger, and to note the returning fire in the keen dark eyes.

"They are fools," answered Lionel, with crisp decision and a telling gesture of the hand. "From the beginning of this threatened siege up till now the blind folly of the Boards has been working woe to Antwerp. I have said so again and yet again. The Burgomaster knows it as well as we do, and so do all thinking men. But we are powerless to resist. It is always the way where the people have the governance, and always will be to the end of time. Men in these lands do not see whither it all

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tends. They hold that government by the people is the best and purest form of rule, yet all the while they are seeking about for one to lead and guide them, even though it be a profligate weakling like the King of France. Had Antwerp been governed by one head instead of five hundred, she might this day have been triumphantly mocking the futile efforts of the Prince of Parma to shut her in. Now we are strictly blockaded, and famine will shortly begin to stare us in the face if help be not forthcoming. The people truly have had their way, and that way is ruin. Each blunder made rivets the chain faster upon us; but wisdom is never learned by experience when there is no ruling head. The Colleges and Boards wrangle bitterly amongst themselves, each blaming the other for what is the fault of all; but as for arriving the next time at a wise decision, that is never the outcome of the matter."

A cold sneer was on the face of the Italian.

"That comes of throwing off the rule of Holy Church!" he remarked. "It will be the doom of you heretic nations first and last. You will think and choose your own way, and that way is the one which leads unto perdition."

Gianibelli was no very great believer in Holy Church himself, and was as ready with his sneers against the priests as against any other class of people, as Lionel well knew. He was practically, what was rare in those days, a man of no belief whatever, although nominally a Romanist. His daughter was often terrified lest he should

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fall beneath the ban of the Church; and this was one reason why she had been glad to stay in Antwerp, even when this siege threatened, because here for the time being he was safe from the arm of the Holy Office. She herself was much attracted by the purer faith which was expounded to her frequently by her lover; but this was no time for controversial discussion.

Lionel had taken up the word again, and was speaking in the calm way of his which generally commanded attention.

"However that may be, we have now this question to face. Antwerp is in a great strait. The genius of one man has brought about a blockade which was thought to be impossible once; it remains to be seen whether the genius of another man can undo his great work, and show the world that the great Prince of Parma has met his match. Paolo Gianibelli is the one man who has the genius for this. If he will come to our assistance all may yet be well. Without such help I greatly fear the city may fall. That is a plain statement of facts."

The eyes of the Italian sparkled. There was something in the nature of this challenge that stirred the demon of restless ambition within him. He was thirsting to set his wits to work against the genius of the great Alexander. Lionel had chosen his words with care, and had produced just the effect he desired; but Gianibelli was not going to let himself be won over in a moment by this argument.

"Then let it fall," he replied with a fierce sneer; "it

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richly merits its fate! What a man sows, that shall he reap; you Protestants who have your Bibles by heart surely know that! Answer a fool according to his folly; cast not your pearls before swine;—is not all that good theology, Master Lionel Wilford? Has not Antwerp richly merited her fate? Why shall Gianibelli forgive the slights and insults heaped upon him, and come to her rescue?"

"Why, because Gianibelli does not act from love to the purblind citizens whom he despises, but in the interests of his mistress Science, who urges her followers to display her powers to the world. Gianibelli has secrets with her which will cause the ears of all who hear them to tingle when once they are revealed. Not for Antwerp, not for the blind fools of burghers, but in the cause of science he will act. He will win renown by defeating the genius of the world's greatest general, and will amply avenge himself for the studied insolence of the Spanish King and his curled courtiers!"

"He will! he will! he will!" cried the fiery Italian, springing suddenly to his feet. "I will be avenged upon them, even as I swore to be! Not for Antwerp, not for her blind fools, but for his own ends, his own vow, will he work. Master Lionel Wilford, you are an honest man, and were all in this city such as you, Antwerp would not be what she is to-day. Your words have prevailed. I will go and see these miserable vessels allotted to me by the noble Board of Schepens. I will see what can be made out of even such things as they. I will show the

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world that not even the accursed parsimony and folly of the citizens can bind the mighty powers I can summon at my bidding. They shall see yet what Gianibelli can do. Though even now I doubt not they will strive to undo my work by one of their mad blunders. Yet we will see, we will see!"

He rose to his feet, and his daughter brought him his cloak. There was nothing like striking whilst the iron was hot. The scheme of these floating volcanoes was dear to the heart of the man who had been poring over his plans for many long weeks. When once he saw the vessels which were actually made over to him to do with them as he would, his soul would be stirred within him, and the old eagerness probably revive. It was thought well that they should instantly go down and see the ships, and the little party of four started forthwith for the water's side. Lionel had had the two selected vessels brought up into a narrow inlet beside St. Michael's bastion the previous evening. There was a convenient creek here which accommodated them well side by side, and the smaller craft also. The fort could supply a good share of the needful requisites, and the work could be carried on privately and quietly, shut off from the eye of curious gazers.

As they walked down to the place, Lionel explained all this to the Italian, whilst Veronica and Malcolm followed, engrossed in their own conversation. The girl's face was grave and earnest.

"Malcolm," she said, "if my father consents to undertake this work and to carry it out, as we hope, I pray thee

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do not let it be known to those Spanish youths that reside with you in your home. I like not the looks of that dark-browed Diego. He is a very reckless and desperate man, I make no doubt; and I trow were he to know he would strive to acquaint the Prince of Parma with the threatened peril, and perhaps undo in some way my father's work. Through the priests in this town the secret might be betrayed, or he might effect his escape. He looks as though nothing would hold him back if once he saw the way open. Take warning, Malcolm: if they have heard that this thing is at an end, let them not know that it has been again begun. I liked not his looks as we discussed it the other night, and I would fain know that the secret would be kept from him."

"I trow thou art in the right, Veronica," answered Malcolm quickly. "I have sometimes thought myself that we speak something too freely before these stranger-guests, though, caged as they are, it does not seem as though they could do much harm. Still any day we might hear that Otto or Joris, who are the regular messengers to and from the city, had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and had been thrown into prison. Then should we at once strive by exchange to get them back, and one or both of these youths would be released. It were not well, were that to take place, that they should know too much. I thank thee for the hint, my Veronica; thy woman's wit is sharper than ours."

She blushed a little, at the tone more than at the words; and Malcolm, drawing her hand more closely within his arm, asked softly,—

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"May I speak yet to thy father, Veronica?"

But she shook her head quickly, whilst her eyes sought the figure of Gianibelli. He was walking in front, and gesticulating as he moved in a way which showed that the talking mood was once more upon him.

"It would be useless—worse than useless. In his own strange way he loves me; and there is nobody else in the world for whom he cares the snap of a finger. Then he calls thee heretic, albeit he cares little for our mass himself. He holds that women are best left with their fathers than to become the slaves and tools of the husbands they marry. He is full of strange fancies, and I fear to disturb his mind, lest he should drive thee thenceforward from his doors. We must be patient, Malcolm—we must watch and wait. Perchance some day the chance will come. He has a liking for thee. It may be some day he will listen; but not yet, I fear me, not yet."

"It has been 'not yet' a weary while already, Veronica," said Malcolm, with a little sigh, though his face was bright and full of hope; for he was confident of the love of this maiden, and was young enough to hope everything and to wait without depression, even if with some natural impatience. "But it shall be as thou wilt, sweetheart; thou dost best know thy father's strange moods. I will wait in hopes that some day by some signal service I shall win the right to claim this hand as mine!"

"That would be good—that would be very good!" said Veronica, with brightening eyes. "I would that thou couldst thus serve him, Malcolm; for I trow he would not

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be ungrateful for service rendered. Perchance thou mayest help him in this task he is about to undertake. We may well hope at least that it may be so."

They had by this time reached the secluded creek where the two vessels were lying side by side. It was a small inlet protected by heavy gates, so that the water could be kept in or let out at will, and the action of the tides regulated. No place could have been better for the purpose in hand; and when Gianibelli saw before him the two vessels which were his now to do with as he would, his eyes brightened, the old enthusiasm came back upon him, and for a moment he forgot the slights put upon him and the disappointments of yesterday in the deep joy of planning anew what he might accomplish, and explaining to those about him the nature of his design.

The two ships were quite seaworthy, though rather battered and weather-beaten. They were small, indeed, as compared with those he had demanded, being only vessels of seventy and eighty tons respectively, instead of from three to five hundred tons, as were those of his own selection; but even with such limited space he was resolved to show what he could accomplish, and the fever of ambition burned high within him as he moved quickly from deck to deck, taking measurements, sweeping the vessels from stem to stern with his keen glances, and muttering all the while to himself in his own tongue. Now and again, as he realized how his movements would be crippled by want of space, he stopped short and burst into scornful imprecation on the blind folly of the Council; but

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having thus relieved himself, he would go to work again with his calculations, and the fire in his eyes would tell that he saw a hundred times more in these battered hulks than those about him could.

The point was gained. The mechanician had undertaken the task. Lionel, greatly relieved and full of hope for the result, went to inform the Burgomaster of this. Malcolm accompanied him, telling him as they walked of the counsel given by Veronica, and suggesting that these matters should no longer be openly spoken of at home, lest harm of some sort might come of it.

Lionel cordially agreed. He had himself sometimes been uneasy at the free way in which municipal affairs were discussed before the Spaniards. He saw at once that it would be better for them to believe that Gianibelli's plan had been foiled through the obstinate incredulity of the city authorities. And this, in fact, is what was thought in Hooch Straet for many a long day, save by certain members of the household. The Spanish captives believed that the idea of the destructive fire-ships had been entirely abandoned, and some amongst the women of the household were of the same opinion.

As for Malcolm, he devoted the whole of his time and energy to the work in hand, and young Maurice was equally assiduous. Both youths were very quick and ingenious, ready of resource and strong at any manual exercise. The scheme of these floating volcanoes fascinated them strangely, and they were eager to see the carefully-planned designs carried out in practical form.

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But the Italian was for many days absolutely silent, and he sat hour after hour lost in thought, with his carefully-prepared designs and diagrams spread out on the table before him. It was no easy matter to modify his scheme and bring it down to limits so narrow as those at his disposal, and sometimes, in a fury of rage at the niggardly conduct of the citizens, he would vow to have no more to do with them or their city, but to leave it to the destruction it well merited.

Anxiety, therefore, was not yet over, even though it was plain that the Italian was contemplating some modified plan of a great explosion. But the work could not be commenced till the plan was matured, and day after day went by and still nothing was done.

"I have found out what is troubling him so greatly," said Veronica one evening, as she met Malcolm in the dark entry of their little home. "He fears that with so much to do with such scant material, he may not effect the damage he has planned. He is longing to go to this bridge and examine it for himself. Many have seen it from a distance—he has done so much himself; but he desires to understand its construction—to know where it is strongest and where weakest. He wants to know more of the structure of those protecting rafts of which we hear, and a number of other details upon which much might depend. He has spoken of taking a boat some dark night and going to see for himself; but I know he would fall a prey into the hands of the cruel Spaniards, and he himself has no mind to be hacked in pieces by them. It is this lack of

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knowledge that is perplexing him. With the three great vessels he could have shattered all at a blow had the bridge been never so strong. But now it is a different matter, and he has need to know more than he does."

Malcolm's eyes had suddenly brightened as he heard this. He said nothing to Veronica, only putting her gently aside and saying he would go and speak to her father; but in his heart he was saying triumphantly,—

"This is my chance, my chance!"

He stepped softly into the den beside the table where the old man sat, and drew the door to behind him.

"Good Master Gianibelli," he began, "I have been thinking that it would be a help to us were we to know something more nearly the structure and strength of this great bridge of which we have heard so much. I have a plan, too, in my head, whereby this information might be obtained."

Gianibelli raised his head quickly and looked into the flushed face of the youth with unwonted eagerness.

"A plan? nay, now, what plan? It is very true that we need a better knowledge of the structure of this bridge; but how to obtain it—that is the question. Your brave Antwerp citizens care not to be made into mince-meat for the sake of their country."

"Nor would they bring us much news were they reduced to mince-meat," answered Malcolm, smiling. "We know that no boat may approach that bridge without being instantly fired upon and sunk by the watchful Spaniards. But there is another way by which we might learn all we

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wish to know. An expert swimmer might well elude the watchfulness of the sentries, and swim and dive all round the structure, and bring word again of all those points we chiefly need to know."

"A swimmer! And where is such to be found? Who in this city of poltroons and fools would thus adventure himself?"

"We are not all fools and poltroons," answered Malcolm, with a laugh. "I may not marvel that ye call us so, but we have some heart amongst us even now. What reward would you give me, good Master Gianibelli, if I were to bring you back all the details you need for the construction of your plan? They say of me that I am the best swimmer in the city. For pure amusement I have often gone far greater distances than this; and I can dive like a duck, and remain long beneath the water, and swim faster than any against whom I have pitted myself. If I go and bring you news, what reward will you give me?"

"Anything you like to ask for, boy, that is mine to give —anything, to the half of my kingdom," answered the old man, fired with a sudden enthusiasm as he saw his way to just those items of information upon which so much depended. "By the success of this enterprise will the name of Gianibelli live or die. Let me once destroy this great monument of Parma's genius, and all posterity will know that a greater than he was pitted against him. All the world will ring with the praises of Gianibelli. I shall achieve greatness—greatness—greatness!"

He waved his arm in the air; the light of exultation

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was in his eyes. Malcolm smiled to himself as he heard these words, and presently said in a low voice,—

"I ask nothing yet. Let me do first what I purpose. If I succeed I will come to you with my request. I have one ready."

Gianibelli scarcely heard. He had gone back to his papers and his calculations. Malcolm stole away and went in search of Veronica.

"Our chance has come, sweetheart!" he cried, "our chance has come! I have a work to do for your father, and when it is accomplished methinks he will deny me nothing;" and then he told her the proposition he had made, and the eagerness with which it had been accepted.

But Veronica's cheek grew pale as she listened. She put out her hand and laid it upon that of her lover.

"Ah, Malcolm, do not, do not! do not hazard thus your life! If you fall a prey into the hands of the Spaniards—"

"But I shall not, dear love, I shall not. I am a veritable water-rat. I am confident of success. And yet let us imagine the worst: let us say that I am taken. If any desire to kill me, I have but to say that Don Alphonso de Castro or Don Diego de Escolano are within the city walls and would be exchanged for me, and my life is safe. I know well that these two youths are noble, and that to get one of them back in exchange for so humble a person as myself would be thought very advantageous. So do not fear, my beloved; trust me, I shall return safe and sound.

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And then having so returned, I will openly ask thy hand in marriage. Thy father can scarce deny it me after what he has said. Let that thought cheer thee in my absence. But, believe me, I shall be safe. I am well-nigh as much at home in the water as on land. The river is a good friend to me."

"But the cold—it will numb and kill thee!"

"Nay; I am too hardy for that, and there is no ice in the flood now. This softer February weather has taken all that away. The moon will give light, and I shall see without being seen. I can swim as noiselessly as a fish, and well-nigh as swiftly. Have no fears for me; I have none for myself. I only marvel the thought came not to me before."

His mind was evidently made up, and Veronica sought not to hinder him. Women were inured in those days to seeing their loved ones go forth to danger and death, and would have thought it shame to strive too much to hold them back. Malcolm's mother was dead; he might have found it harder to run deliberately into peril had she been there to bid him not thus adventure himself. His father was far away, and Veronica was his first and chiefest care. It might remove the greatest obstacle from his path in striving to win her, and if so the risk was well run. The adventure was not without charms for him, and very eager was he to carry the plan into action. He spoke of it only to Lionel and Maud; and though both feared for him, neither would bid him stay. There was no man in Antwerp better fitted for the task; and they had

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confidence that if it were to be done at all, their brother had the best chance of accomplishing it.

The February nights were calm and still, and just now not very cold. There was a full moon in the sky, and though this would oblige him to be more cautious in his movements, it would enable him to see those things he had come to see, which in a dark night would be invisible. The waters of the great river were brown and turbid. He might very likely pass quite unnoticed if he merely kept a part of his head above the water. That he could remain many hours in the water even when it was colder than now, he had demonstrated many times before. He consented to wear a home-made cork jacket for a part of the journey, to avoid needless fatigue; but this would have to be thrown off when he reached the bridge, where he would need to dive frequently to examine into those details so important to Gianibelli. Of course, he would go with the ebb-tide and return on the flood. The expedition was planned with care and nicety, and the boy was in a fever till he could be off.

His brother accompanied him to the water-side on the appointed night, and together they pushed off in a light skiff, which was carried down to the appointed place by the strong ebb. Malcolm meantime made his preparations, and when all was in readiness grasped his brother for a moment by the hand, and then dived almost silently from the boat and struck out with long, quiet strokes down the great swirling river.

Lionel turned and looked back at the brown head which

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was all that was visible above the turbid stream, and uttered a prayer for the daring swimmer going forth so fearlessly on his errand. He watched till the black speck had disappeared from his view, and then silently returned to the city and to his home.

But Malcolm, though reserving his strength for what was the most important part of his errand, swam rapidly and boldly down the river, helped by stream and tide alike, his heart full of courage and resolution, fearless and full of ardour and of hope in the promised reward. The lights of the city quickly disappeared; he seemed all alone on the black, cold river. Bitterly cold indeed it was, but to one so hardily reared this cold mattered little. He had many times disported himself amongst the ice-blocks for pure sport. What was this chill to him? He scarcely gave it a thought, so warm was his heart with hope and love.

Down, down, down — rapidly and silently he was whirled along. He heard from time to time the step of the sentries along the dike, the clang of arms as they saluted, or a stray shot perchance fired at some imaginary object on water or land. But he heeded all this no whit. Out in mid-stream he was safe from observation even from the keenest eyes. His own eyes were fixed steadily ahead for the first sight of the great bridge.

Ha! what is that—that long black line lying upon the water like the body of a great snake? Yes; there is no doubting it. That is the bridge! Malcolm rose higher in the water, and treading it with his feet took a long look at

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the strange low bulwark rising out of the swirling river. It caused him a thrill of admiration now to picture how it had been built in the teeth of the winter storms and ice-floes, and with enemies above and below. How was it—ah, how was it that Antwerp had remained so strangely apathetic whilst this great work was being carried on? But at least she should not show herself apathetic now. She was awakening from her trance—at least it might well be hoped so—and she would see whether, if Parma were able to make, Antwerp might not yet have power to mar!

And now began the most perilous part of his journey. The bridge would doubtless be strictly guarded. There would be sentries pacing upon it, and any sudden noise in the water would attract their attention. The moon was not very bright, but still it was shining clearly in the sky, as indeed was needful for his purpose. It behoved him to act with great caution; and slipping off his cork jacket, he at once sank lower in the water, and was therefore less visible to any watching person.

He did not swim any longer, but floated gently with the current, so that not a ripple was made by his presence in the water. And thus gently and quietly he came straight down upon one of those protecting rafts which guarded the bridge like inanimate sentinels on either side.

He had to be careful now, for the raft was abundantly furnished with sharp hooks and prongs and pointed stakes, and it would have been an awkward thing to be impaled on one of these. But Malcolm had all his wits

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about him, was prepared for this obstruction, and swam cautiously about it, taking note of its construction and strength; and finally diving under it, in order not to approach too near the shore, came quietly up on the other side.

There were sounds of life in the air here. The forts of St. Mary and Philip on either hand showed gleaming lights within them, and the tread of sentinels on the battlements and along the planked pathway of the great bridge told Malcolm that the Spaniards were not to be caught napping. Holding to the raft with one hand to steady himself, he took a good survey of the bridge and its environs, and then dropping silently back into the water, he was carried down upon it by the tide.

Unluckily for him, just at this moment the moon sailed out from behind the light film of cloud which had hitherto veiled her face, and shone with a remarkably brilliant light; whilst a pair of gulls floating upon the water, disturbed by this sudden apparition of a human head, broke forth into discordant cries, and flew away with a noise and a fuss. The sentry on the bridge, attracted by the sound, looked, and before Malcolm had had time to dive, he caught sight of the bobbing head.

Malcolm beneath the water knew not what happened on shore, and hoped he had passed unnoticed; but as a matter of fact the alarm of "Spy in the river!" had been instantly raised, and in a few seconds a dozen skiffs had put out from either side of the bridge, whilst a hundred sharp eyes were sweeping the river to catch the first sight

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of the swimmer when he should rise. For a while Malcolm baffled them. He did not know the imminence of his peril, but caution warned him to be very silent and careful. He lay upon his back, and only let himself rise for a moment to take breath, and then down he sank again. After having done this for some minutes, he began to think his alarm needless. The swirling of the dark water prevented him from either seeing or hearing anything that went on about him. His ears were full and his eyes half blinded, for the water was thick and muddy. At last he was forced to come up in a more satisfactory manner and gasp for air; and scarcely had he done so before he heard a stern voice close at hand speaking words in the Spanish tongue equivalent to this command,—

"Do not shoot him; take him alive."

Malcolm would have dived again, but it was too late. Something whistled round his head, and a cord tightened suddenly about his neck. The pressure was so great that for a moment he lost consciousness, and when he recovered it was to find he had been hauled into a boat which was being rapidly driven ashore. The rope was no longer round his neck, but it bound his feet and hands. He was wrapped in a mantle, and laid along the boat like a bale of goods, and for a moment he was so dazed and giddy that he knew not what had befallen him. His captors were talking over his head, and thanks to the Spanish words and phrases picked up from their guests, he was able to understand the drift of what was passing.

"A spy from the city—come to examine the bridge,

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doubtless. A brave youngster, whoever he be! Kill him? well, perhaps, but not yet. It may be the Prince would like to have speech with him, and learn how they are faring within the walls, and whether they still hope anything from his Majesty of France. We can wait to hang him till the morning. He may have somewhat to tell us that the general would like to know."

And presently Malcolm heard a word of command given as they neared the shore—given by the officer in charge of the boat:

"Keep him safe; clothe and feed him. Keep him till the morrow. The Prince must know what we have found, and settle what his fate shall be."

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CHAPTER XV.

A GENEROUS FOE.

PHYSICAL fatigue has a wonderfully tranquillizing effect on the human nerves. Malcolm Wilford knew himself a prisoner in the camp of the redoubtable Spanish general, and fully expected to be hanged upon the morrow; and yet no sooner had he been warmed, fed, and clad, and laid himself down upon the pallet bed shown to him by the soldiers into whose care he had been put for the night, than he fell into a sound and dreamless sleep, and slept profoundly until awakened next morning by the unwonted sounds of camp life.

Opening his eyes in some bewilderment at the strange and unfamiliar tumult about him, he recognized the fact that he was sleeping in some sort of hut, roughly built of planks, that his feet were strongly though loosely bound together with a cord, and that he was in the keeping of certain swarthy Spanish soldiers, who were busy over the preparation of a morning meal of no very sumptuous description. He was dressed in clothes of a character different from anything he had worn before in his life, and was covered with a heavy mantle to protect him from

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the cold, which was sufficiently keen in the early morning hours.

After a few moments of exceeding perplexity, Malcolm remembered his swim of the previous night, and the sequel which had made him a prisoner, and an odd thrill that was not exactly fear, although it was just tinged with awe, ran through him as he realized this was probably the last day he had to live. Spies were invariably doomed to death. Hanging was the best fate he could look forward to. He thought of his home; of Gianibelli and his scheme for the annihilation of the wonderful bridge; of the news he was eagerly looking to receive from the swimmer. Was this to be the end of all? Then he thought of Veronica, and a mist rose before his eyes. Fearing to think longer lest he should become unmanned, he sat up on his pallet bed, and the men gathered about the rude table all turned and looked at him. They had been speaking in low tones amongst themselves all this while. Malcolm, who had picked up a little Spanish from hearing Alphonso and Diego talk, and had had a little instruction from the former in the language that was beginning to be familiar to the Netherlanders, caught here and there a word that they spoke, and when he found himself observed of them, wished them a good-morning in their own tongue.

They smiled at that, and bid him approach the table and eat; and with some little difficulty, on account of his fettered feet, he did so. They were not unkindly men, and shared their not too liberal commons with him, asking him questions, in mixed Spanish, French, and Dutch, of his

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swim the past night, seeming amused and impressed by the fact that he had swum all the way down from the city in order to examine the structure of the bridge.

They called him a brave *muchacho,* and went so far as to hope his life might be spared for his bravery. The Prince was not like some of their former generals. He was much more merciful, and valour was valour to one who had a great reputation for personal bravery himself.

Malcolm was able to respond heartily when the praises of Alexander were spoken; for the citizens of Antwerp always gave him his due, even though his genius was their chiefest danger. The meal had just ended, and the soldiers were preparing to depart, when a firm footstep without caused them to straighten their figures in a preparatory salute, as they murmured to their captive,—

"It is our captain—he who took you out of the water last night."

In another moment a tall young officer entered through the low door and dismissed the soldiers by a gesture, remaining alone with the prisoner, who had risen to his feet and was contemplating him eagerly.

"You are the spy that was captured in the river?" he asked sternly; and Malcolm bent his head as he replied in his best Spanish,—

"Yes, Señor; and if I do not greatly mistake me, you are Don Rodrigo de Castro, whose brother—"

"Brother!" interrupted the young man with impetuous haste. "Boy, if thou canst tell me aught of my brother—

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But stop. How knowest thou me? Hast seen my face before?"

"No, Señor; it is from your likeness to Don Alphonso that I knew you. He has told us of his brother, Don Rodrigo, who was also with him in the city the night of his capture."

"Capture! He was captured then, not slain? I heard he had been cut to pieces by a rabble rout in the square."

"And so he would have been, Señor, had not my brother interposed to save him and his comrade. The people were greatly incensed, because, not many days earlier, our good friends the Zeelanders had been cruelly maltreated by the Spanish soldiers, as perchance you know; and our citizens would have revenged themselves by doing the like to those men. But they had sought shelter in the porch of my home, and my brother claimed them as his prisoners, and has kept them ever since. They were both so sorely wounded that we scarce thought they would have lived. But our women are excellent nurses, and we have skilful surgeons in the city; so after some weeks they both began to amend. They remain, however, yet with us, my brother being responsible for their safe-keeping. Prison life would soon make an end of Don Alphonso, and we are all too much attached to him to wish to see him leave us."

Rodrigo stood rooted to the spot, drinking in every word spoken by his captive. His eyes shone strangely, and at the end of the speech he suddenly made a step forward and held out his hand to Malcolm.

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"Boy," he said huskily, "if my brother owes his life and safety to the good offices of thee and thine, I will lay down mine own life sooner than that a hair of thy head shall be harmed. Tell me more of him! I had given him up for dead. He is well and whole? He has recovered from his grievous hurts?"

"He is sound and whole in one fashion—he can go about the house and be as others there; but he still looks very white and thin, and there be times when we know that he suffers much pain, though he speaks not of it. He cannot bear cold or exposure or fatigue. If he takes a walk with one of us along the streets, he is soon forced to turn back. He cannot mount the steps to the ramparts without losing his breath and looking spent and wan. He still needs the care the women folk at home are glad to give him, and a warm, quiet corner by the stove. Methinks he would not live long if he were here in this camp. It is well for him that he was left behind in the city."

Rodrigo's face, which had been full of eager hope, fell somewhat as he heard these last words. Stepping to the door of the hut, he gave a rapid order to a passing soldier, and then turned back to ask more details as to the capture of his brother and Diego.

Malcolm was telling the tale when another young officer entered—a very splendid-looking man both as to his own figure and his accoutrements; and Malcolm at once guessed that this was none other than Don Carlos de Cueva, of whom he had heard much from Alphonso. Nor was he mistaken in his supposition.

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Both listened eagerly to the story; and Carlos exclaimed beneath his breath at the close,—

"We might have known Diego would get into mischief. I would we had not left him! And he, you say, boy, is sound and well; it is Alphonso alone who remains feeble and weak?"

"Don Diego is slightly lame, and methinks he will halt for the rest of his life; but he is as strong and sound as ever, and frets sorely at his captivity. He is not like Don Alphonso, and will make friends with none of us. He remains beneath our roof, yet he is a stranger to us all. But Don Alphonso is like a friend and not a foe."

"Rodrigo," said Carlos, in a rapid undertone, "we can surely get Alphonso now released. We will exchange him for this boy here. His brother will rejoice to make the exchange."

"Señor," said Malcolm, who had heard and understood, "my brother will do even as you say, as I well know; but if you would let me counsel you, I would not ask for Don Alphonso back. He would die in a few weeks were he to face the rigours of camp life in these inclement months; nor is he fit for the fatigues of a journey to his own land through a country devastated by war. Don Diego might well be released to you. He frets like a chained hound, and he could fight with the best of you despite his lameness. But Don Alphonso would gird on his sword and go into battle, and would fall before the first blow. Leave him within the sheltering walls of Antwerp; he will fare better there, believe me. I think he is not unhappy; and

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unless famine stare us in the face, he will not have any hardships to endure. Our house is well victualled; my brother's wife took care of that long since. We can defy famine there for many a long month to come, even if there be no quick termination to the siege. Leave him with us, and take Don Diego as your exchange; and when the long siege terminates in one way or another, Don Alphonso will be restored safe and sound. But to bring him hither would be to bring him to his death."

Rodrigo and Carlos consulted together for a few moments; but Malcolm's words had a ring of truth in them which carried conviction, and the relief of knowing Alphonso to be living and in kind keeping was so great that little else seemed to matter. To bring him back to the camp with his health in the state described by the prisoner would be madness, and these two Spaniards knew, as he could not, how very near famine often was to the army of the belligerents.

"He will fare better there than here," said Carlos, with a slight shake of the head. "I would fain see his face again; but it were kinder not to take him from the comfort of a city home. This lad will give him news of us, and of our motive in desiring Diego rather than himself. I would not have him here unable to fight or take his part as of old; he would struggle till he dropped at his post. He is better where he is."

"Truly I think that myself; and that boy has an honest face, and is a bold youngster to have done what he has done. We must take him to the Prince and let him

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tell his tale there. Then we will send him back to his home, and methinks it will not be long before Diego will be amongst us. They will scarce regret to part with him, and he will fly hither like an arrow from a bow once he is released. I misdoubt me if he will be as grateful as he should to these good burgher folks who have sheltered and tended him so long."

Carlos smiled and shrugged his shoulders. They both knew Diego too well to expect gratitude from him towards those who had been instrumental in his capture, however kind they had been. His was a fierce, proud, unforgiving temperament; but he was too good a soldier and officer not to be welcomed back, and their general would be glad to have news of him.

It was with a sense of great curiosity and interest that Malcolm found himself standing in the presence of Alexander Farnese, Prince of Parma. He had time to examine this great personage as he held rapid talk with his two young officers before addressing himself to the prisoner. In height the Prince was nothing remarkable, although his great strength could be detected by an experienced eye in the wiry, muscular proportions of his frame, and in his quick, alert movements. He was not handsome, and yet there was great power in the face, the lower part of which was almost lost in the bushy beard. The eyes were extraordinarily quick and keen, with the rapidly-shifting glance of the experienced swordsman. His head was round and bullet-shaped, and his features were regular and good. But the strength of the face lay in its expression, which

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cannot so easily be described. The gaze of the young Malcolm was riveted upon it, and as he watched the quick play of light and shade over the features, he did not wonder at all the stories he had heard of the genius of Farnese.

After a few minutes' rapid talk with his two officers, the great general turned upon the lad and questioned him in a quick, terse way as to his exploit of the night before. Malcolm answered frankly and fully. He said no word of Gianibelli or his scheme, but candidly admitted that all Antwerp was anxious to know something of the construction of this wonderful bridge, and that he had volunteered to swim down and try to examine it in detail. He had hoped to avoid detection by his quickness in diving and power of remaining for long under water; but the Spaniards had shown themselves too watchful for him, and he had fallen a prisoner into their hands.

The Prince listened with a grim smile on his face, but the fearless bearing of the youth seemed to please him. Moreover, he had heard how the burghers of Antwerp—the family to which this youth belonged—had sheltered and befriended two of his favourite officers in their hour of need, and he was not going to be outdone in generosity.

"You have come to see this great bridge of mine, boy? Then you shall not be disappointed. You shall see it in every detail; you shall study it to your heart's content; and then you shall return to your home and tell in the city all that you have seen, and what chances there are of breaking through this fortification. You shall go thither without condition. That much I owe you and yours for

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your good-will to my soldiers. I will ask nothing in return."

"But I know that something will be given in return for such clemency and such courtesy, Sire," answered Malcolm, interrupting with boyish impetuosity. "I pledge my word that one of our prisoners shall be restored to the camp. It rests but with Don Rodrigo to say whether it shall be his brother or Don Diego."

"I will settle that point," answered Alexander, with his habitual quick decision. "Let Don Diego de Escolano be returned hither. We want here no sick men for the work of the camp." He bent a kindly glance upon Rodrigo as he spoke thus, and added in a lower tone, "If it be with Alphonso as this youth says (and methinks he is one who speaks the truth), it would but be bringing him to his death. We know what the hardships of this life are. Let him remain where he is well off."

"In truth, my general, I know that you are right," answered Rodrigo. "My own judgment says the same, only that I long to look upon his face again."

"That thou mayest do in any case ere long," answered Farnese, with one of his quick, rare smiles, and all his listeners understood his meaning. He looked confidently forward to a triumphant entry into the city ere long. "Now take the lad away; show him everything, feed him well, and send him back under safe escort through our outposts. —Boy, thou art a brave lad; I would thou wert serving on the right side. Go on as thou hast begun, and thou shalt find a friend, an thou needest one, in Alexander of Parma."

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He turned away as he spoke and strode out, never idle for a moment, and seldom speaking an unnecessary word. Malcolm saluted him with something very like enthusiasm, and then followed his two conductors, who themselves showed him the whole construction of the great bridge, not letting any detail pass unnoticed; for they argued, as Parma had done, that each fresh evidence of its strength and completeness would help to strike dismay into the hearts of the Antwerp citizens, and that this report brought home to them by their own messenger would be another blow as heavy as any they had felt before.

It was no small condescension on the part of these young nobles thus personally to conduct the city-bred youth over the bridge; but Malcolm had come with news of Alphonso, and as they walked, and as he used his eyes, he could talk to them of the prisoner in Antwerp, no detail respecting whom was uninteresting to his comrades in the camp. Rodrigo had many messages to send. He was half remorseful now that it was Diego who had been selected for the exchange, should Lionel Wilford consider himself bound by his brother's word, and send one of his captives back. But the general had himself decided the point, and Malcolm was well able to assure Rodrigo that he believed Alphonso would himself have wished that Diego should be released before him, seeing that the one was fit for service and the other not; and that whilst Diego chafed like an imprisoned tiger in a cage, his more gentle-spirited comrade had learned to accommodate him-

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self to circumstances, and to be content in his humble but comfortable home.

And so, with many mutual words of courtesy and good-will, Malcolm found himself dismissed by his kindly captors from the Spanish camp, and sent off under the charge of a captain and a few men to be conducted past the outposts and through the lines, till he found himself within his own defences again.

* * * * *

Meantime within the city walls the keenest anxiety for the fate of Malcolm was being felt by those half-dozen persons who knew the nature of the errand upon which he was bent. Lionel had returned home after starting forth his brother, and had snatched a few hours' repose before setting forth to try to meet him and bring him home. It had been arranged between them that the boat should carry a lantern in a certain position; and that Malcolm, seeing this light, should make for it, and be taken on board, Lionel being provided with stimulant and food as well as warm clothing for the chilled and exhausted swimmer. They had nicely reckoned the time necessary for the examination of the bridge, and for the return swim on the top of the rising tide; and Lionel went to the tryst in the full hope of picking up his brother before long. But though he remained for hours upon the dark river, there was no sign of the swimmer, and as the tardy dawn broke over the wide expanse of waters the heart of the watcher sank within him. Why had he let the boy go on such a desperate venture? How

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could any human frame stand that amount of exposure and fatigue? And then the perils from the watchful enemy, and the fearful disadvantages of a swimmer before any armed man in a boat! He was terribly afraid that some mischance had befallen the youth, and was almost glad his mother had passed beyond the reach of anxiety or grief. When the day had really come and nothing had been seen of the boy, he gave up his quest and returned mournfully home. If he came back now it would be by another way. No human frame could have stood twelve hours of exposure to the ice-cold water. With a brow clouded with care he took his way back to Hooch Straet, and his appearance there alone spoke volumes to all who knew what was happening, and why Malcolm was absent from the house.

"Thou must go to Veronica," said Lionel in a low tone to Maud, as they rose from the breakfast-table, after a meal that had been delayed much longer than the usual time on account of the absence of the master of the house; "she will need somebody with her to bear the suspense of the day. Tell her that I by no means give up all hope of a safe return, but that plainly things have not gone as we planned for them to do. Some untoward chance has befallen. But Malcolm has skill and courage and address. He may save himself by these, even though the peril may have been greater than we contemplated. Go to her and strive to hearten her. Let her not think that all is lost."

So Maud went off to the Italian's house; Lionel to the

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river-banks, to linger there and try to pick up news of his brother from any boats that might be coming in. Roosje went off as usual to the market; for there was still some semblance of a market kept, albeit those things that yet found their way into the beleaguered city were wondrous scarce and dear. As the sun was shining brightly, old Van der Hammer suggested to his wife that they should take the children with them, and walk forth to see how it fared with some of those friends of theirs in the city whom they had not seen of late. A certain restlessness seemed to pervade the whole household. It was as if all had an inkling that something unwonted was astir, although not all knew what it was nor whither Malcolm had gone. They were used to the disappearance of their men folk from time to time. Joris and Otto were scarce ever at home for above an hour or two at once; and Malcolm had his duties too, though the militia was not often called into active service at this juncture.

Thus it came about that Maurice and Coosje were the only members of the household left at home, save the two prisoners; and Maurice had seized this opportunity to engross Alphonso in a discussion over a Latin poem he had been long engaged upon, descriptive of the siege of Antwerp, although it professed to treat of some city beleaguered by the Roman legions.

Maurice was the student of the family, and had discovered kindred tastes in their guest. Alphonso, educated at the College in Salamanca, was a youth of rather brilliant scholarship for an age when scholarship was higher than

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it subsequently became. He was ready enough to examine the verses and discuss them with the youthful author; whilst Coosje sat at her wheel in admiring silence, marvelling at the erudition of her brother; and Diego lay scowling, half reclined upon the broad settle, chafing against the bonds that held him, and marvelling how his companion could thus demean himself to enter into the immature fancies of a burgher boy.

Presently Coosje bethought herself of something she wanted that involved an expedition into the market-place, and rising quietly she donned her cloak and hood and passed silently out into the street, closing the door behind her.

Suddenly, as this happened, a change passed over Diego's face. A sombre light filled his eyes, and his limbs began to twitch in a fashion indicative of keen emotion.

Now it had been a point hotly disputed between himself and Alphonso whether or not he was a prisoner on parole. Alphonso had passed his own word, and would sooner have put a bullet through his brain than have broken it. But Diego objected that he had given no pledge. He admitted that his parole had been taken for granted, but he still maintained that it had not been spoken; and when Alphonso argued that this was only the outcome of his long insensibility and subsequent delirium, and that it would be dishonourable beyond measure to take advantage of what was a mere oversight, and was understood to be a bond on both sides, he only listened in sullen silence, muttering that he did not see where the bond came in, and

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that if people were careless, they must take the consequences of that carelessness. He had long been secretly brooding over the possibility of making his escape, and now it seemed to him as though the moment had come when he could put his project into execution.

Although no open and visible watch had ever been kept upon the prisoners, who were both looked upon as men of honour on parole, yet there had been hitherto so many persons always about, that practically all these months it would have been very difficult for either of them to leave the house without being observed; and almost invariably if they did desire to walk abroad, one or another of the men of the family would accompany them to insure their safety in the hostile city.

This had so chafed Diego that he had almost always declined to leave the house, and his exercise had been taken in the garden behind. This garden ran backwards for some little distance, and there was in its high wall a small door leading out into the narrow little Crommenellebogh, which, as he now knew, led straight down to the Hoy Kay and the river.

In the plans he had been fond of laying, even when he had no hope of being able to put them into execution, owing to his lameness, he used often to think of the little door and that narrow dark street. Turning out of it at right angles, a little below the door, was a still narrower and darker alley, leading between the blank walls of the gardens that lay behind the Hooch Straet and a parallel thoroughfare; and he had often wondered whether he

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might not slip into this dim place, secrete himself in some doorway till it grew dusk, and then, wrapped in his mantle, slip down to the river, and make off in a little skiff unseen and unheard, to float silently down the dark water till he reached the first fort, where he would be safe from pursuit.

When he had laid his plans he had not seriously thought of carrying them out, because the chance appeared as though it would never come. But now, behold it was his very own at this moment! He had every detail of his plan complete in his head. Why not act instantly?

Almost mechanically he rose from his seat, and with some sarcastic remark to Alphonso declared he should go upstairs. The weather was now a little less severe again, and he had been wont to remain for the whole day shut up in his room.

"I shall want no dinner but this," he remarked, as he helped himself to a hunch of bread and some cheese on the shelf. There was nothing very remarkable in his saying this, for it was known that the long flights of stairs separating the kitchen from the upper chamber allotted to the guests tried Alphonso not a little; yet he would not suffer any member of the household to wait upon his comrade when Diego's sullen temper kept him from joining the family below.

Diego went heavily and slowly up the stairs, and shut the door loudly behind him. Once there, however, his manner completely changed, and became active and cautious. He looked himself well over, and was apparently

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satisfied that he looked far more a Dutchman than a Spaniard. He then stole into a neighbouring room, and brought thence a long, dark, heavy cloak belonging to Lionel, but not often worn owing to its weight. It had a high collar that when put up almost concealed the face of the wearer; and a hat with a falling brim was soon found in the same room. Thus attired the young Spaniard looked marvellously like Lionel, for their height was something the same; and though Diego still limped a little, and would to the end of his days, he was able to conceal this pretty well when he moved slowly. Then he looked round the room at the various weapons which lay about, and reached out his hand for a sword that stood in a dark corner. He felt a thrill run through him as he did so, half of exultation, half of shame. In his heart of hearts he knew that he had no right to gird a sword about him, or to go forth from these hospitable doors in the fashion he meant to do. But sheltering himself behind a subterfuge unworthy of that honour which a Spanish nobleman always prided himself upon holding untarnished, he let his ardent longing after liberty lead him astray, and a few minutes later he stood breathless and panting in the narrow Crommenellebogh, casting sharp glances about him to right and left, and pulling the hat closely over his eyes to make the disguise more complete.

But he need not have feared. As it so chanced, there was nobody about to observe him; and Diego was so little known to the neighbours that he might almost have walked through the length and breadth of the city unchallenged.

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It was his guilty conscience rather than any real danger that made him slink into the still narrower alley, and find for himself a hiding-place which he thought would completely conceal him for as many hours as were needful before the dusk enabled him to put his plan into execution. He argued that it would be hours before he was missed—probably not till night—and then he would be far away on the river. Or if by chance his flight were discovered earlier, he would never be looked for so close at home, and might still by cunning and caution—

"Lionel! Lionel! what dost thou here?"

Diego's pleasant reverie was thus interrupted by a voice he well knew. He had been but half-an-hour in his hiding-place; and what evil chance had brought this girl down upon him? A fierce, wild thought sprang up in his heart, and with a sudden menacing gesture he turned upon her, and she started back with a little cry of amazement.

"You, Señor!" she exclaimed, and then it was plain that the truth burst in upon her. "You!" repeated Coosje, in accents of strong contempt. "A prisoner on parole! Is this Spanish honour?"

The taunt caused him to gnash his teeth, for the shaft had struck home.

"Take care, juffrouw, take care!" he hissed through his closely-shut teeth. "Have a care how you speak to me. I am not on parole; my word was never asked or given."

"Ah, I see; only understood. Spanish honour again!"

He made a step forward and grasped her by the wrist.

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The place was absolutely lonely. He could have run her through the body as she stood, and the crime might have remained for days undetected. She knew that better perhaps than he; but she had the fighting spirit of the despised burgher race within her, and she did not fear him, even though the light of murder was in his eyes.

"Mistress Coosje," he said, in the same hissing whisper, "you had best have a care what you say and do. Pass me your word to go home and say nothing of what you have seen, and to feign complete ignorance when my absence is discovered, and I will let you go unharmed; but if you refuse—"

"I do refuse, Señor," she answered, her dark eyes flashing. "I will lend myself to nothing so base as such an escape as this. Kill me if you choose; we women of Antwerp have long faced the thought of dying at the sword's point of the *brave* Spanish soldiers, who love to wage war against helpless women and babes. Kill me if you choose—it would be all in a piece with the noble bravery of your present conduct—but I will never, never make myself a party to your dishonourable flight. We men and women of Antwerp have a standard different from the vaunted one of your Spanish grandees. We hold our word as our bond, spoken or implied; and our men seek men as their antagonists, and wage not war on women. Yes, strike me, Señor—strike me to the earth; I fear you not. We can but die once; and when death comes we can but face it boldly, as those may do who are not afraid to meet it!"

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She stood facing him like a lioness at bay: small and slight as she was, there was intrepid courage written in every line of the slim figure and the dark, mobile face. Diego had drawn his dagger, and in his eyes was a blaze of fury; but though he had struck many women to the earth before, and that almost in cold blood, he found he could not strike this girl even in the height of his passion.

With something very like an oath he dropped his weapon to the earth, and it stuck in the dust point downwards. Coosje might have possessed herself of it at that moment, but she made no attempt to do so, maintaining her former attitude without letting her eyes stray from his face.

"Will you kill me, or will you return with me?" she asked calmly. "I trow it must be either one or the other. For if you do not kill me, and will not come back with me, I must summon instantly the guard, and you will be thrown into the city prison and loaded with fetters. I ask you if you will then be in better case than with us. Now, Señor, I linger not here in talk; you must make your decision quickly."

He would willingly have strangled her as she stood, and marvelled at his own folly in not doing so. He knew not why he restrained his hand; but he had lifted it once in vain, and would not risk another attempt. He felt that some power which he did not understand restrained him from laying hands on this girl. The vindictive scowl still furrowed his brow, but his hand had dropped to his side.

"And if I return with you?"

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She seemed to divine his meaning, and spoke quickly and earnestly.

"Señor, pass me your word of honour—pass me your parole, which you say you have given to none as yet—and we will return together as though you had but escorted me on mine errand, and we were returning in like fashion. There be none to ask questions at home. Maurice is in the clouds, and all else are abroad. Give me your word, and I will tell to none this false step of yours. I trow when you have had time to think of it, you will see it as I do."

Sullenly, yet without hesitation, moved by a power he did not understand, Diego silently unloosed the sword he had girded to himself, and placed it in Coosje's little hands.

"I yield to you, mistress," he said. "I never thought to give up my sword to a woman. My word I pledge to you. Until you restore the pledge I hold myself bound on parole."

A quick, bright smile beamed over Coosje's face. She took the heavy weapon and held it thoughtfully for a moment. Then she held it out to him and said with a smile,—

"Carry it for me, if you please, Señor; it is heavy for me."

And thus they retraced their steps homewards side by side.

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CHAPTER XVI.

BRIGHTER DAYS.

"BROTHER, here is Malcolm coming down the street. It is Malcolm, albeit he looks more like a Spanish soldier. Where *can* he have got his clothes from?" and Coosje turned round in the room, her eyes full of wonderment, which did not diminish as she saw the effect produced by her words.

"Malcolm!" cried Lionel, starting up and crossing the room with great strides. "Heaven be praised, it is he, alive and well!" and without another word he strode from the room and through the entry towards the door. Maud's face had turned from pale to red and from red to pale. Her eyes were full of the sudden tears which had started to them.

"Oh, thank God he is safe!" she murmured beneath her breath; and Coosje looked at her with wondering eyes.

"Where has Malcolm been? Why are you so excited about him?" she asked softly; but Maud was too much agitated to enter into explanations.

"Thou wilt know all soon, dear Coosje. He is here to tell his tale.—O Malcolm, dearest Malcolm! can it really be thine own self?"

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"Why, yes; it would seem so, sister mine," he answered gaily, as he warmly returned Maud's passionate embrace. "How dost thou like thy Spanish brother? Is he not a marvellous fine fellow in these borrowed plumes?"

"O Malcolm, Malcolm! hast been in the hands of the Spaniards?" and the girl shivered lightly as she spoke. "O my brother, I can scarcely believe it is thou. Does Veronica know that thou art safe?"

"Ay, she does. I went thither first, just to show her all was well, for I knew her anxiety would be as sore as thine. And where are our Spanish guests? I have news for them which will please them, I trow.—Ah, Señor," as Alphonso advanced towards him with a look of vivid interest and curiosity upon his face, "I have a letter for you from your brother. As good-luck had it, it was into his hands that I fell when I was hauled out of the water and taken into the Spanish camp. I knew him from the likeness betwixt you; and marvellous kindness did he show me when he heard what I had to tell of you. Oh yes, I have been mightily well treated in the enemy's camp, good friends. I can no longer let it be said that our foes are always cruel and bloodthirsty. I deserved nothing more nor less than to be hanged as a spy; and behold me here in your midst, clothed and fed, and as handsomely treated as heart could wish."

They were all crowding round him to hear his story, and whilst he told it with graphic detail, Alphonso stood aside reading his letter by the dying daylight which stole in through the window. Diego was not there. He was

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upstairs in their own chamber, as was often his way. He had been present at the mid-day meal, but had since disappeared. Alphonso read his letter with quick eagerness, the colour fluctuating in his cheek as he did so. He looked eagerly round for his companion as he reached one place in the missive; but as he was not there, he returned to his perusal of the closely-written page, and read it to the last word.

Then he stood leaning his brow against the glass, lost in thought. He started as a gentle voice spoke at his side.

"Señor, methinks it is hard that Don Diego should have his liberty before you, the more so that it was his rashness which led to your capture in this city."

Alphonso looked round to find Maud standing beside him. The room was full of noise; Malcolm's adventure was being discussed by the whole party, with many exclamations and no little clatter of tongues. Practically those two in the recess were alone together; no one was listening to or observing them.

Alphonso's eyes were strangely bright, as the eyes of a man who is passing through some mental excitement or crisis. Hardly seeming to know what he did, he put out his hand and took one of Maud's in his clasp. She flushed quickly, but made no motion to withdraw it.

"Lady," he said softly, "I do not think that I regret the decision our general has made. I am glad for Diego to have his liberty; but for myself, I do not seem greatly to desire it."

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She looked wonderingly at him. Her face was very beautiful in its expression of trustfulness and sympathy.

"I am glad we shall not lose you—if you are willing to stay," she answered softly. "You are indeed not fit for a soldier's life yet. It would grieve us to think of you suffering hardships and privations. It is better to remain where you can be cared for until this inclement winter weather be over."

His eyes shone brightly as he asked gently,—

"Sweet Mistress Maud, would it grieve you to think of me as suffering hardship in our camp again?"

"Indeed, Señor, it would," she answered softly. "You are so little fit for it. Methinks a month of that life would kill you."

"I can well believe that myself," he answered; "and yet it was not that thought which made me glad to remain here." Then raising the hand he held a little, he asked in the same soft tone, "And would you grieve to think that I was dead, when so many gallant soldiers fall daily in one camp or another? What is my life more than theirs?"

Maud made no attempt to answer, but softly drew away her hand, her heart beating thick and fast as she realized with a strange pang what a blank in her life would be caused by the death or the absence from their circle of this young Spaniard. She was frightened at the force of her emotions, and her reply was very falteringly spoken,—

"Nay, Señor, it is always different when those fall whom we know and love;" and then, as if half afraid of the sound

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of her own words, she shrank away from him, and joined the group standing around Malcolm, slipping her hand within his arm, as if for protection against herself. She did not want to think any more about Alphonso just then, nor the words which had passed between them. Maurice had been despatched upstairs to summon Diego to hear the good news in store for him. Lionel had at once said that of course one of the prisoners should be sent back to Parma's camp in return for the clemency and good-will shown to his brother. All were glad that Diego rather than Alphonso should be the one to leave them; although, as Maud had said, it seemed rather hard that he who had provoked the quarrel and the subsequent capture should be the one first to obtain his liberty. But Alphonso did not take that view.

"It was my doing that the adventure was planned. But for my curiosity we should never have run into the peril at all. I have often told myself that the fault was mine, and felt it hard that Diego should suffer for it; and he suffered more than I, for I have been happy here, owing to the unfailing kindness and courtesy shown to me by all. I am glad, indeed, to think that my brother has been able in some sort to repay the debt of gratitude which I have contracted here."

"It has been repaid fourfold," said Lionel with some emotion, as he laid his hand upon Malcolm's shoulder. "If this boy had perished ignominiously as a spy in the hands of the Spaniards, I should never have forgiven myself for letting him go."

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By this time Roosje had lighted the lamp, and the supper was being laid out with a festal air upon the table. Unwonted dainties graced the feast to-night, in honour of Malcolm's happy return. As Diego came into the room with a perplexed look upon his face (though the habitual sullenness had vanished since the morning, and had not returned), Lionel stepped forward, and taking down a long Spanish sword that hung against the wall, he presented it to him, and said,—

"Don Diego de Escolano, I here return to you your sword and your word of parole. You are no longer my prisoner, but a free Spanish subject—free to return to your master's camp at your own pleasure. Wait till the morning as our guest, and then we will send an escort with you past the lines and forts of Antwerp, and you shall be given safely into the hands of your countrymen. From this moment you are a free man, and a prisoner on parole no longer."

A dusky flush had arisen in Diego's cheek as these words were spoken, and his glance roved wonderingly round the room, and fastened at last upon the face of Coosje. He seemed to ask a question with his eyes; and perhaps she understood the meaning of the question, for she slightly smiled and shook her head, though no one else in the room saw the little by-play between them. Alphonso had come forward, and was explaining in rapid Spanish what had befallen Malcolm that day, and how their general had decided that of the pair of prisoners it was Diego who should return to him, if one were given

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in exchange. For a moment Diego seemed disposed to resist—the listeners did not catch everything that passed between the comrades, although the drift was understood by them—he was urgent for a few moments that Alphonso should be the one to go; but a perusal of Rodrigo's letter, and a further explanation from his friend, seemed to show him that they had better abide by the decision of others; nor did Alphonso wear the aspect of a man upon whom some heavy disappointment had fallen.

"He is either wondrous generous, or he is happier with us than one supposed," mused Lionel; "and doubtless he knows he is little fit for the soldier's life of that camp. Yet methinks he is not one to shrink from active duty. Can it be that he is attracted by the freedom of our faith? He is often anxious to discuss with us points of doctrine and the interpretation of Scripture. Perchance the light is making its way into his heart. It is marvellous how clearly it will shine when men once begin to turn towards the Sun of Righteousness."

Supper was a joyous and festal meal that night. The health of the Spanish general was drunk amid general plaudits, and a spirit of amity and good-will prevailed amongst the party which Diego did nothing to spoil. Indeed, he had never been so agreeable, modest, and cordial as he appeared now, and the scornful intolerance of his manner had totally disappeared.

That evening the stove in the long room was lighted, and the party once more adjourned there to spend an hour or two. Several friends dropped in to hear the rights of

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a story that was being whispered abroad with regard to Malcolm's wonderful escapade. The reason for his daring swim down to the bridge was kept a secret; but that he had wished to examine its structure somewhat closely seemed natural enough, and his description of it was listened to with the greatest interest.

Meantime Diego watched his opportunity, and when Coosje chanced to be alone in a rather obscure corner of the room, he suddenly marched down upon her and said, in a quick, impetuous way,—

"Mistress Coosje, I desire to thank you for what you saved me from to-day. You were right, and I was wrong. And here I ask you whether you give me back my parole; for to you I am yet bound, and without your consent I hold myself yet a prisoner."

"You have your word back, Señor," answered Coosje, her eyes lighting. "I gladly restore it; and if I have said aught amiss to you in taunting you unjustly, I ask your pardon. My temper is quick. I sometimes forget myself; and perchance my tongue has sometimes run away with me."

"I do not think you have ever spoken a word I did not richly merit," answered Diego, with unwonted humility. "I thank you for showing me this day what manner of man I was, and for saving me from a deed which must have tarnished my honour for ever. I shall not forget that I owe you a debt—a debt for that, and a debt for your silence, where nine women in ten would have cried the thing aloud in the market-place. Mistress Coosje, I am not

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ashamed to go away your debtor; and if in days to come it is mine to have the chance to show mercy to a countryman of yours, I will remember the mercy shown to me, and will repay it in as far as my duty permits me."

"I thank you, Señor," answered Coosje, with her flashing smile; "and I shall gladly think of this, and remember that we part as friends."

"And I would fain have something of thine to remember thee by when I shall belike see thee no more," said Diego, with more of feeling in his face and voice than she had credited him with possessing before. "Thou art the bravest maiden I have ever met. Wilt give me something of thine as a keepsake?"

Greatly surprised and a little flattered by the request (for Diego in this mood was like a lion bound with chains of roses), Coosje cast about in her mind what she might give him. It was not a lover's token, for there was no sentimental feeling in her heart towards him, nor had he addressed one syllable of love to her; but there was a secret between them which seemed to make a bond, and although it was probable they might never meet again, she was not sorry that he should sometimes think of her. She debated in her mind a while, and then loosened from her neck a little agate heart which she wore there. It had been given her by her old nurse—a Papist, though a good woman and faithful to the core; and as a child she had believed that certain valuable properties had attached to the lifeless thing. The growth of reason and knowledge in her mind had dispelled much of the illusion, but she still

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continued to wear the heart, and it was not to every one she would have given it; but she felt that Diego would prize it more than she did.

"See, Señor, you shall have this. It has been blessed by the Pope, and they say it will keep the wearer safe from harm. I hold not with such beliefs; but yet I was wonderfully preserved from harm to-day. Take it. Perchance it may be of some help to you—not to preserve you from bodily peril, but to keep you in mind of your vow of mercy when your hot blood is stirred. In that way it may help to withhold you from the peril of cruelty and bloodthirstiness. But, see, my sister is regarding us. I must not linger here longer."

Coosje moved away from his side, and Diego thrust the little token into the breast of his jerkin. In this softened mood he vowed not to part with it, although likely enough he might never see the donor again.

On the next day he took his departure, under the care of Lionel and a few troopers. He was conducted to the Spanish lines, and there made over to his countrymen with great show of courtesy on both sides. These little interludes in the midst of the war made pleasant breaks in the monotony of the siege, and showed to the belligerents that the common tie of brotherhood still existed between them.

Old Gianibelli listened with the closest attention to Malcolm's account of the construction of the bridge. He cared no whit for the personal adventure, nor the dire peril in which the youth had been placed. His mind was bent upon the thought of destroying the famous work and

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winning immortality for himself; and all other matters were mere trifles to him, hardly worth a second thought. When the young man ventured to remind him of his promise and ask when he might espouse his daughter, his suit was received with a short, dry laugh.

"Marrying and giving in marriage! Will the world never learn better of its folly? What do you want with a wife, boy, when Antwerp may be destroyed any day, and you and your house exterminated? Do you think you will escape if Parma enters with his Spanish legions and gives over the city to pillage and the sword? Peace, boy, and think no more of such folly! Am I to give my daughter to marriage, knowing that she may be made a widow before another year has run its course?"

But Malcolm did not see the matter altogether in that light, although he was not unwilling to admit that this was hardly, perhaps, the time for making marriages. After a great deal of discussion and railing, he wrung from the old man a permission to betroth himself solemnly to Veronica. To the lovers this was almost enough, at least for the present—more than they had dared to hope; but Malcolm was now of immense use to Gianibelli in his labours, and in his own selfish and sardonic fashion he was fond of the boy. He would have minded little enough had he been killed in some of the skirmishes that went on daily around the city; but as long as he was there to help him he was glad enough to use him. He argued that in all probability the bold youngster would be killed before the close of the siege, and Veronica released from her troth-

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plight. He had a superstitious regard for his word which made him half afraid to refuse what Malcolm asked, but he entertained an unnatural hope that he would be released from the necessity of carrying out his promise.

Meantime the work of the "hell-burners," as he had christened his fire-ships, proceeded steadily and rapidly; and in very truth the vessels seemed to merit the name given them.

To explain into what manner of vessels these infernal machines were made by the exertions of Gianibelli and his associates (for he had the assistance of two clever men of Antwerp—Bory the clock-maker, and Timmerman a mechanician), it will, perhaps, be simplest to quote verbatim the words of the historian Motley, whose fascinating account of the siege of Antwerp deserves to be read and studied by every lover of history. This is what he says of Gianibelli's fire-ships:—

"In the hold of each vessel, along the whole length, was laid down a solid flooring of brick and mortar, one foot thick and five feet wide. Upon this was built a chamber of marble mason-work, forty feet long, three and a half feet broad, as many high, and with side-walls five feet in thickness. This was the crater. It was filled with seven thousand pounds of gunpowder, of a kind superior to anything known, and prepared by Gianibelli himself. It was covered with a roof six feet in thickness, formed of blue tombstones set edgewise. Over this crater rose a hollow cone or pyramid, made of heavy marble slabs, and filled with mill-stones, cannon-balls, blocks of marble, chain-shot,

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iron hooks, plough-coulters, and every dangerous missile that could be imagined. The spaces between the mine and the sides of each ship were likewise filled with paving-stones, iron-bound stakes, harpoons, and other projectiles. The whole fabric was then covered by a smooth, light flooring of planks and brick-work, upon which was a pile of wood. This was to be lighted at the proper time, in order that the two vessels might present the appearance of simple fire-ships intended only to excite a conflagration of the bridge. On the *Fortune* a slow match, very carefully prepared, communicated with the submerged mine, which was to explode at a nicely-calculated moment. The eruption of the other floating volcano was to be regulated by an ingenious piece of clock-work, by which, at the appointed time, fire, struck from a flint, was to inflame the hidden mass of gunpowder below."

It will be seen from this description what deadly monsters these two "hell-burners" were intended to be, and how careful was the labour bestowed upon them by the master-mind that had planned the whole thing.

One of his ships he had christened the *Fortune*, and the other the *Hope*. To give such names as these was thought a good augury; and as the work progressed slowly but surely, a feeling of hope arose within the hearts of many of the citizens of Antwerp. Already the pinch of want was beginning to be felt within the walls. It was not famine yet. Real famine was still some distance off, in spite of the folly the burghers had shown in the matter of victualling their town, but it was near enough to excite

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anxiety and a feeling of restless impatience, and anything which promised deliverance from the iron hand of the besieger was feverishly welcomed by the city.

Gianibelli was still personally unpopular, and any measure of his regarded somewhat askance; but as time went by, and the monster fire-ships still continued to progress, and important and influential men like the Van der Hammers and the Wilfords approved and applauded the skill of the contriver, a different feeling began to prevail, and the city came to look forward with eager impatience for the time when the preparations should be complete and the floating volcanoes launched to do their work.

And just now there were gleams of light in the sky which cheered the hearts of the patriot party shut in within the walls of Antwerp. The Prince of Parma had long cast covetous eyes upon the important city of Ostend, the possession of which by his enemies was a perpetual hindrance to him. He had sent out a strong expedition against it, and it had been carried by surprise. But the Spaniards had made exactly the same blunder here that their enemies had done at Bois-le-Duc; and the soldiers dispersing to pillage the place before it had really been secured, the military and citizens within the walls had rallied against them and driven them ignominiously forth, slaying great numbers; and Parma had had to own himself ignominiously defeated.

At this juncture, too, the absolute hopelessness of the delusive French negotiation became known to Antwerp. The French monarch, after keeping the delegates waiting

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all this time, buoying them up with false hopes, playing one of those interminable games of intrigue which it has taken three centuries to unravel, mocking them, dallying with them, serving them in a fashion which raises the ire of the reader even now, had at last flatly declined the proffered sovereignty of the Netherlands, and had thus brought to an abrupt close the hopes of the patriot party that France would come to their aid.

The eyes of the city were opened at last. Antwerp had nothing to hope for save from her own energy and from her old allies of Zeeland. It was as if the city on fully understanding this awakened suddenly from a long and deadly trance. There were those within her walls who rejoiced to see an end put to these delusive negotiations in which they had never trusted, and which had had the effect upon the burghers that a narcotic drug has upon the human frame, paralyzing and numbing its activity and inducing a deadly languor; but there was plenty of the old fighting spirit still left in them, and when they once realized how they had been tricked and befooled, their one cry was for vengeance, vengeance, vengeance!

It was not against France, however, that any step could be taken. Indeed, France still affected a warm interest in the welfare of the patriot party; but something must now be attempted against the beleaguering foe. If Antwerp were to be saved now, she must be saved by her own efforts. For there was no help for her beyond that which the patriots of Holland and Zeeland could furnish.

"We will do something; we will show the haughty

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Spaniards that, French or no French, we can still show fight!" And then a quick and secret enterprise was planned to recover the treasured fort of Liefkenshoek, the loss of which the people of Antwerp had never ceased to regret.

Count Hohenlo, thirsting to retrieve his reputation so seriously damaged at Bois-le-Duc, had taken up his position at Lillo, the fortress on the opposite side of the river. Joris and Otto were still with him, and still retained their reputation as the swiftest and most trusty messengers whenever communication was wanted with the city.

Through them the family in Hooch Straet was well posted up in the news, as these stalwart messengers passed to and fro. The Zeelanders, who were always ready for any expedition by water, were to join with the soldiers from Lillo and make a sudden and furious attack upon the fortress. And then, as the Burgomaster had strictly laid down in his despatches, if once successful there they were to push on to fort St. Anthony, farther along (the dike of St. Anthony joined the river-dike at Liefkenshoek); and if they succeeded in capturing this place, the whole of the high ground of Doel would be theirs. Then so soon as this was done it was of paramount importance to send a strong party along the river-dike towards Kalloo. The dike just below that place had been ruptured, but if a fort could be run up upon that ruptured end, the bridge could be battered by artillery, and possibly gradually demolished. If once these places could be carried there was hope yet for Antwerp. Either the bridge must go or the Kowenstyn Dike be pierced. Only in one of these two ways could

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there be relief for the city. Just at the present juncture there seemed greater hope of destroying the bridge than the dike.

Great was the excitement within the city. It was known that the great "hell-burners" were now ready—that the work of the patient Italian was complete—and that, so soon as the tide was favourable to the attempt, the *Fortune* and the *Hope*, together with a whole fleet of smaller and practically harmless fire-ships, were to be sent forth on their mission of destruction. At last the city was awake; at last she realized that to her own energies she must look if she were to be saved.

All the place was astir; every ear was strained to catch the sound of firing from the distant Liefkenshoek upon the night of the attack and sudden surprise. April had now come, and with it the first promise of spring. It seemed as though with the awakening world of nature the burghers of Antwerp were likewise awaking to a sense of their peril and their responsibilities. Every man from the city who could be spared had joined the garrison at Lillo. It was not easy, with Parma's bridge between, for men to get from one place to the other; but there were ways and means for the hardy and fearless to run the gauntlet of the Spanish sentries, and though some bold youths fell a prey to their audacity, there were others who got safely through, though many more had to return to the city unable to accomplish their object.

Three days of tense anxiety went by, and then the welcome news was brought by the brothers into the city.

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"Victory! victory! no blunders this time, and only one small disappointment!" cried the eager youths, as they stood on the steps of the church to give their message to the excited crowd. "Liefkenshoek is ours—carried at a blow! St. Anthony is ours—taken after a short, sharp fight! Our good friends the Zeelanders were there with their boats. By sea and by land we beat them, and half the garrisons are slain by the sword or drowned. They say the Prince of Parma has beheaded the officers who commanded those forts, and who escaped with their lives to tell the tale at Kalloo. I can well believe it of him, for they showed marvellously little fight. To be sure, we took them by surprise; but they had no business to be caught napping. The only point where we failed was to get possession of the end of the dike by the bridge. The great Alexander was before us there. Whilst we were flinging ourselves upon St. Anthony he realized what our next step would be, and he sent his own forces there to set up a fort where we had hoped to plant one, and the Spanish flag was waving there in the morning; and it was too near to Kalloo and all Parma's force for us to dare to attempt it. But Liefkenshoek is ours, and St. Anthony is ours. Antwerp is showing what she can do, and I trow that this first victory will not be the last!"

Shouts and cheers rent the air. The people were like those mad with joy. The messengers were carried on the shoulders of the crowd to the Burgomaster's house, where they told their tale again. Joy-bells were rung, and had not economy to be carefully studied the whole city would

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have been illuminated. It was not that this victory was in itself so marvellous, or so immediately advantageous to the city; for whilst the bridge stood between the walls and those fortresses which commanded the river lower down, no very great good could come to the citizens from the fact that they did command both banks. But it was the feeling that the tide of misfortune had turned at last which made glad all hearts in the city that night. They had begun to feel that disaster waited on all their undertakings; that some spell was upon them, some demon-power fighting against them which nothing could break. To have carried out successfully one plan, to have effected without serious blundering this single expedition was like an elixir to them. The spell seemed broken which bound them; they began to cry aloud that their star was rising again and that of Parma setting. Antwerp would be saved!

That joyful cry was in every man's mouth that night. Even Lionel, who was not wont to be elated by trifles, was cheerful and hopeful as he sat discussing with his brothers-in-law the details of the assault.

"It matters the less that the fort upon the dike was not erected, because the fire-ships are now ready; and the Burgomaster is of opinion that no time should be lost in following up one blow by another. I was with him to-day. He went down with me to examine the work, and was greatly struck thereby. He and the crabbed Italian were marvellously friendly. Our Burgomaster is a wonderful man for adapting himself to his company. There will now be nothing to wait for. Parma has in these last weeks

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received several heavy blows. I trust and hope that the one in preparation for him to-morrow may be the hardest of all."

"If the bridge can once be swept away, or even a breach made, all will be well," said Joris. "The Zeeland fleet are awaiting this new attempt, anchored about Lillo and Liefkenshoek. I am to see the Burgomaster to-morrow early, and take final instructions from him anent the code of signals to be arranged betwixt them and the city. But if the Italian's infernal machines can only do the half of what he claims for them, Antwerp may by this time three days hence be practically a free city once more!"

Roosje clasped her hands together in a sort of ecstasy.

"Pray Heaven it may be so," she cried, with a little sob. "It is a terrible thing to be thus shut in and beleaguered."

"Otto I must leave to your care, sister," said Joris. "He has a nasty flesh-wound in the shoulder, which will keep him from acting messenger for a while. Keep him safe at home, or he will give you the slip yet; and make him sound and whole as fast as you can. It is like going without one's double when I go alone on mine errands."

Otto growled at the thought of being left behind, but was obliged to submit, as to travel in a maimed condition was but to court peril for both. He had had some trouble in reaching the city that day with his brother's help. He was resolved not to be left behind when there

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was such good news to tell; but he knew he could not start forth again upon the next morning.

"But no matter," he said; "I shall be here to see the fire-ships started. And, Joris, when the way is clear, and the great bridge torn in twain, see that thou art in the first of the Zeeland boats which will come sailing up the river into the city."

"Trust me," answered Joris gaily: "I will take good care I am not left behind."

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CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIRE-SHIPS.

"I WILL not have it so! He will ruin it all! I say I will *not* have him! Who says that he shall intermeddle—the fool who runs away and blunders over everything he takes in hand? He shall not spoil my plans — he shall not! It is not to be tolerated for a moment!"

The Italian was speaking in the greatest excitement. He clinched his brown, thin hands together; his eyes sparkled and flashed with a passion that was terrible to see; his small body worked with fury; and he seemed about to fly at Lionel, who was speaking to him, as though he were some noxious and deadly foe.

"My good friend," answered Lionel, whose face was clouded, and who did not appear to resent the anger which he was striving to pacify, "with the method in which this plan is to be carried out neither you nor I have any concern. That is in the hands of the authorities of the city, and we cannot possibly resist their determination."

"I will resist it!" yelled Gianibelli furiously; "I will

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resist it to the death! I will blow up my own ships and the whole city with them sooner than give them into the care of yon cowardly fool, who would ruin the best plan that was ever yet laid. Nay, it is useless to speak to me; it is useless to argue with me. I will hear nothing—nothing — nothing! O ye city of fools! why did I ever try to come to your aid? O ye blind brutes and beasts! would I had blown the whole scum of you into the air before I had striven to come to do your bidding! Is the labour of weeks and the salvation of the town to be thrown away through the blind, cowardly incompetence of one man? It shall not be so—I swear it shall not! Go back and tell your Burgomaster that sooner than let Runaway Jacob touch one of my vessels, I will blow them to pieces with my own hands, and all Antwerp with them!"

Things were plainly getting serious. Malcolm gave his brother a warning look, and said in quiet, soothing tones,—

"Let me go and see the Burgomaster. I can tell him more of this work than any one else, seeing that I have been with you in it from first to last. I will go and put it all before him, and come and bring you word again. Perchance when he hears all he will not withstand you. Let me go and see what I can do."

Gianibelli had turned his back, and was already in his den, the door of which he slammed in their faces with a bang. During all these past months that he had had dealings with this irascible Italian, Malcolm had never seen

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him so angry. He was almost afraid he would carry out his threat in his passionate fury; and telling Veronica to keep careful watch upon his movements, he took his brother's arm and led him out into the street.

"Did he not know before how things were to be done?" asked Lionel.

"I did not know he was in ignorance," answered Malcolm. "True, his thoughts are all with the design itself, and the adjustment of the slow match and of the clockwork have engrossed his mind to the exclusion of almost all else these many days. But I had not thought he would be taken thus by surprise at the last. It will go hard for the city if he refuses to let the vessels go."

"He cannot do that," answered Lionel briefly. "They are the property of the city, and not his own. All the material has been provided him out of the public stores, and already the ships have been taken possession of by the pilots who are to conduct them the first part of the journey. These men have all received minute instructions from him. Practically his work is now done, though I am sorry enough that it should end like this."

"I would myself that the charge of the undertaking were given to anybody rather than Admiral Jacobzoon," remarked Malcolm. "What dost thou think of him thyself, Lionel? Is he fit for the task in hand?"

"I would sooner it had been given to another man," answered Lionel, with a slight gesture of the shoulders that bespoke a certain amount of contempt. "Koppen gaet Loppen is not beloved in the city, nor are his talents

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as a commander thought much of. Our Burgomaster would, I believe, have willingly appointed another and a better man; but it is not easy to pass by the Admiral, and give an expedition so important as this into other hands. Moreover, Jacobzoon has many friends on the Board, and when the question of his competence was raised, there was a warm dispute. The will of the many always carries the day here in Antwerp, and so it has been with this. I see not why Jacobzoon should not do the duty demanded of him as well as any other man; but—"

The pause was significant. Malcolm gave a quick look at his brother.

"Thou dost not trust him, Lionel?"

"I trust his good-will in the cause, but neither his courage nor his competence. We know how our Burgomaster declared that but for his cowardice the enemy's fleet would have been captured coming down to Kalloo; and when a man has blundered once, one finds it hard to trust him again. But then, as the Board clearly pointed out, in this service no fighting is required of him; and no man can say that he is not competent to watch and report, and signal the Zeeland fleet if a breach be made in the bridge."

"Is that what it is his duty to do?"

"That is all his duty, in so far as Gianibelli and his fire-ships are concerned. The matter stands thus:—The Admiral is to despatch the fleet of ships in a certain fashion, as laid down by the Italian with the approval of

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the Board. The thirty-six small vessels—pure fire-ships—are to be started in lots of six at a time, every half-hour, from dusk till all are sent on their voyage, and then the *Fortune* and the *Hope* will follow, one behind the other. They will have their pilots, as thou knowest, to steer them a part of the way down towards the bridge; but these will silently leave them in skiffs before they approach too nigh, and return rapidly to the city ere the explosion occurs. The Admiral will be waiting for that explosion in an appointed place; and so soon as it has taken place he will send forth a barge—probably he himself will go in it—to see whether or not a breach in the bridge has been made, and what is the amount of damage done to the army of our enemies. Should he find that our purpose has been effected, and that there is a cleft in the bridge, he sends up a rocket; and at that signal our brave allies the Zeelanders, now waiting and watching at Lillo, will immediately sail fearlessly into the city with a store of provisions that shall keep us from all fear of famine for many long months to come. In the morning, so soon as it be light enough to see, the combined fleets of the city and the Zeelanders bear down upon the shattered bridge and sweep it away into the swirling waters of the Scheldt. Oh, methinks that if the Italian's inventions be one-half as harmful as he dreams, by this hour to-morrow the siege of Antwerp will be at an end, and the crown of laurel plucked from the head of Alexander of Farnese!"

Malcolm's eyes glowed. It was not often that Lionel allowed himself to speak in terms of enthusiasm and hope.

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He was always careful not to expect too much, and to give full consideration to the many difficulties in the path of any great achievement. But this plan of Gianibelli's had been carefully and closely studied by him, and he had assured himself of the probability of its success. It was as simple as it was terrible, and he did not believe it would fail. And if the breach were really made in the bridge, the thing must be quickly discovered by those set to examine; and the signal would bring their allies sailing into the city long before the startled and shattered Spaniards could combine together for resistance.

There was good hope to believe that the flower of their army would be blown to pieces; for it was certain that Parma and his generals would be gathered together upon the bridge, watching the action of the fire-ships, and ready to extinguish any conflagration which might break out along the palisade. This, indeed, was part of Gianibelli's plan. He wished to engross the thought and the attention of the army with these comparatively harmless boats, that the approach of the dark monsters might not be observed, and might only excite derision when they did appear. Probably by that time the Spaniards would think that the Antwerp fire-ships were but a child's playthings after all, and would mock at rather than fear the approach of the two slumbering volcanoes.

All this was fully understood by the Wilford brothers, who had helped in a measure to plan the whole undertaking, and by the Burgomaster, who had been from the first disposed to think hopefully of the plan. He received

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Lionel courteously, and listened with knitted brow as he told his tale of Gianibelli's wrath and fierce threats; but at the latter he only smiled.

"The fire-ships have now passed out of his keeping into that of the city authorities, and he could not touch them even if he wished. He must remember that now they have become a part of the fleet, and have been placed under the charge of the Admiral. Neither he nor I have power to alter the plan laid down by the Board. It has been fully discussed in the Council, and the Broad Council has also had its say. I am far from saying that were I master here I would not have settled something different; but as you know, and as all Antwerp should know by this time, I have little more power than a simple citizen burgher. I will seriously caution the Admiral to use his powers discreetly, and to be zealous in the discharge of his duty. More than that I cannot do. But if you think it would please or pacify the old man, I will presently visit him in his house, and will strive to show him that the matter may be trusted to go well. If his machines do their work, not even Admiral Jacobzoon can rob him of his triumph."

The Burgomaster was as good as his word. When he had done all in his power to assure himself of the zeal and discretion of those immediately concerned in the expedition, and had satisfied himself that everything was likely to go well, he made his way to the dark little narrow house, and found the old man shrunk together in a sort of heap in a dark corner of his den, his head resting upon his hands.

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his whole frame looking collapsed and meagre. This was often his way after one of his violent outbreaks of passion. He would retire into his den, and remain motionless and speechless for hours. His daughter never dared to address him at such a time, and those who knew his ways generally kept their distance till the sullen mood had passed. But the Burgomaster was above being deterred by the unpromising aspect of the man, and sitting down near to him told him anew in detail everything that had been planned, expressing regret that the arrangements did not meet his views, but explaining that it was impossible now to change anything, and that he trusted his fears would prove groundless. Blunders enough had been made in Antwerp to shake the confidence of the world—he fully admitted that; but in this instance all was such plain-sailing that there was little to fear.

"If your fire-ships do their part," concluded Sainte Aldegonde, with the pleasant geniality of manner which had often stood him in good stead with his refractory burgher coadjutors, "I think I may promise that the Admiral will do his. He cannot well help knowing what has been the result; and even if his head is somewhat thick, he has but to fire off a rocket, and his work so far as you are concerned is done. I think we need have no fears on that score. So cheer up, my friend, and you and I will keep watch to-night together within the Boor's Sconce, which will be, I reckon, the best vantage-ground for seeing the rocket go up; and you shall be the first to carry the news to the great square, where all Antwerp, I

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trow, will be watching and waiting, and where the bells shall be set pealing to carry the joyful news to every citizen in the place."

The magic of the Burgomaster's silver tongue was not altogether thrown away upon Gianibelli. He saw that the great man at least believed in him and in his ships, and that was something. Also there was a natural reaction from the intense passion of the morning; and although still sullen and deeply affronted by the method agreed upon with reference to the sending forth of his fleet, he no longer combated it fiercely, or talked wildly of firing the volcanoes and destroying the city. He looked up with the red fire gleaming in his sombre eyes, and his voice was quiet, although bitterly sarcastic.

"My fire-ships will do their part. Have no fear of that, Signor Burgomaster. I will answer for them. I would you could answer as well for your own servants. Mark my words—Koppen Loppen will ruin everything. You smile now; perhaps you will not smile some days or hours hence. But, after all, what do I care? My work will be done; the bridge will be shattered. My name will live for ever side by side with that of the Prince of Parma, who is worth all you fools of Antwerpers put together. What is it to me whether Antwerp rises or falls? Nothing, nothing, nothing! I will do my work, for the sake of mine own honour and renown. If it comes to naught the shame will be yours, not mine. I care not. I wash my hands of results."

There was something strangely sinister in the old man's

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tones and in the fiery gleam of his eye. The Burgomaster felt a cold thrill run through him; it was as though some prophet of ill had spoken—some prophet who had power to read the secrets of the future. Sainte Aldegonde was not entirely devoid of the superstitions of the age in which he lived, and the belief in witchcraft was common still even amongst those professing the purer faith. This bright-eyed Italian had long passed in the city as a necromancer and a wizard. Was it possible he was able to read the secrets of the future, and know what was about to come to pass through the agency of the stars, or by other occult methods? Sainte Aldegonde would willingly, even at the eleventh hour, have made some change in the plans laid down by the Council had he possessed the power; but he knew that to attempt it would probably bring a hornets' nest about his ears, and so mortally offend the Admiral as to court the very peril he was striving to avert. After all, was it not foolish to be so much affected by the words of this passionate and irascible man? He was known to be possessed of a peculiarly violent temper, and of a boundless contempt for Dutchmen in general, and for Antwerp citizens in particular. This contempt might not be altogether unmerited, but it did not conduce to a just estimate of the powers of the man under discussion.

So argued the Burgomaster to himself, and tried to dismiss from his mind the misgivings the Italian's words had aroused. He went again to look at the ships, again he went over every detail with the placid Admiral, who was perfectly certain that everything would be right, and

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could not understand the subdued anxiety and urgency of Sainte Aldegonde's manner.

All Antwerp was in a fever that day. The success at Liefkenshoek had filled the city with joy. It seemed as though the tide had now turned in their favour, and all were confident that to-night the great bridge would be annihilated. The rebound of spirit from deep depression to almost feverish exultation had set the whole place in a ferment. As the day drew to a close this excitement visibly increased, and it was well known in the city that there would be no sleep for Antwerp that night.

The alleys to the river at certain places were guarded by soldiers, otherwise the people would have come pouring down in such numbers to see the start of the fire-ships, that there might have been danger of confusion and mistake. A few persons only were allowed on the Boor's Sconce with the Burgomaster and Gianibelli; and amongst those few were Lionel and his brother Malcolm, who were known to have been in the confidence of the Italian wizard from the beginning.

The little fleet of small vessels, together with the two great "hell-burners," were anchored a little lower down the river than the Sconce. Gianibelli had paid one last visit, under the charge of the Burgomaster, to see to the final adjustment of the clock-work and the slow match; and now he stood rigid and silent, leaning against the stone-work, his thin hands twisted tightly together to conceal their tremulous twitching, his face like a carving in yellow ivory, his eyes glowing with lambent fire:

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a strange, weird figure, fit to be the master-spirit of this weird and fearful expedition. As the shades of evening fell, the strange fire in those dark eyes seemed to glow more and more brightly, as the stars in the sky become more luminous when the daylight fades.

And now from the expectant knot about him there goes up a little gasp, and a thrill runs through all frames. The first little fire-ship has started forth upon its voyage, and scarce has one gone before another follows, and then another, and yet another, and thick and fast the little fleet is sped upon its way with the first of the ebb. Gianibelli, who has been gazing with all his eyes, counting the vessels and twitching in every nerve with tense excitement, now breaks into rapid speech.

"I said so! I said so! I knew he would ruin all if he could! What was he told? To send them off slowly, steadily, gradually, at intervals. What is he doing? There they all go, helter-skelter, in a body, ready to entangle each other, ready to run aground in a mass, all in confusion—no order, no method! Oh the fool, the fool, the blind fool! O city of madmen and imbeciles! What care I whether ye come to ruin or no? Do ye not richly deserve your fate?"

Sainte Aldegonde was not a little displeased at the haste which the Admiral showed in sending off the fiery little fleet; and this disregard for orders was not encouraging, after the precise nature of the directions given to him. With a hasty exclamation of irritation and surprise, the Burgomaster quitted the Boor's Sconce to go and remon-

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strate with the thick-headed Jacob, and get him to remember better his instructions. But it was not easy to approach the spot owing to the crowds of people thronging the alleys and lining the river-banks. When the Burgomaster at length forced his way through the crowd, and had gained the landing-stage from whence the start was being made, he found himself too late. The two great vessels had been started off immediately in the rear of their small heralds, and already the barge containing the Admiral and the sailors selected by him to accompany him had followed. Sainte Aldegonde clinched his teeth and muttered between them some words anything but complimentary to Koppen Loppen, and slowly returned to his former post. It seemed to him that there was something ill-omened in this impetuous and ill-judged haste at the start. It might not make any real difference to the fate of the little vessels thus sent forth, but it was an infringement of the orders laid down; and if a man failed to obey instructions in one point, might he not do so in others?

He was received on his return with a sneering question from Gianibelli.

"The Admiral is showing the mettle of which he is made right well, Master Burgomaster, is he not? He is living up to his name of 'Runaway.' He is in a mighty hurry to set things going. Will he be in as much haste to return to the safe shelter of the city when the volcanoes open their mouths and belch forth fire and stones and every hurtful missile? Look to it, ye blind fools of Dutchmen: your Admiral will yet ruin all!"

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Sainte Aldegonde strove to pacify the angry man, but his own heart had begun to misgive him. He wished now that he had insisted upon accompanying the Admiral himself, as he desired; but he had let himself be dissuaded on the ground that when the rocket rose to tell the city of the triumph of the fire-ships, the Burgomaster would be needed there to direct operations, and to prepare for the concerted attack upon the Spanish camp, by which the first successful onslaught must be followed up.

It had seemed such a simple office just to follow the ships and make sure of the amount of damage done. A child could almost have been intrusted with the task. The Council had laughed to scorn the suggestion that the Admiral was not the best man for it. It was exactly the office, they said, he was best fitted for; it involved no activity, no fighting, no personal risk or forth-putting, but only a power of patient waiting and subsequent reconnoitring, which he seemed eminently to possess. The Burgomaster had been obliged to admit that for such services as these Jacobzoon was certainly not unfit; and yet, now that the man had gone and the arrangement could not be changed, he felt himself consumed by a terrible fear lest after all some new blunder should be made, and this well-planned scheme frustrated.

But the conditions of wind and tide were all favourable to the little fleet, and Malcolm, who had accompanied them along the ramparts as far as it was possible to do so, came back with the cheering report that in spite of the disorderly way in which the boats had been started, they

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were almost all pursuing a straight course down the wide river; that though near together they were not running into each other or flaring up too quickly; indeed, so far as the watchers along the banks could see, the little fleet was bearing down upon the bridge as well as though directed by human agency.

Somewhat mollified, but still scornful and morose, Gianibelli stood apart, and took no share in the eager talk that went on about him. Indifferent to the fate of Antwerp he might be, but he was not indifferent to the fate of his own cherished project. Were that to succeed, he believed that his name and fame would ring through every Court in Europe, and that the supercilious Spaniards, who had flouted him in their pride a year or two before, would shudder at the sound of his name. This thought was to him like the elixir of life; hence his intense absorption in the fate of his fleet, although for the city of Antwerp he cared no whit.

It was a strange and almost terrible time of waiting—waiting as the night grew darker and colder, as the moon rose higher in the sky and seemed to look questioningly down upon the strange aspect presented by the city all awake and abroad; waiting, waiting, watching with that strained expectancy that betokened a life-and-death suspense. And indeed it did seem as though for Antwerp life and death hung in the balance. Let that bridge once be swept away, together with the choicest of Parma's army, and Antwerp would again be free, free, free! and the long, long war might soon be at an end!

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What was that?

Watchers from a height looking over the sullen waters of the flowing river had seen a great flash. A column of flame shot suddenly up into the air; the top of that fiery column was seen by those waiting and watching upon the Boor's Sconce, and the vivid though transitory glow in the sky was visible for one strange, intense moment to the whole city.

Then a pause of death-like stillness, in which it seemed as though the fall of a pin would have been heard from end to end of the hushed and breathless city, and then—what?

A crash, a roar, a shaking of the very foundations of the houses, a quivering even of the mighty walls. Windows rattled, walls quaked, the earth seemed to heave and sway beneath the feet of its terrified yet exultant citizens. Women shrieked and clung to each other in an agony of mingled emotion; men broke into exclamations of wonder and triumph; and all through the city there was a stir, a flutter, a sense of strange exultant vibration. Now had the time for action come; now had the blow been struck! They must awake like a giant refreshed from the long apathy which had lulled them into fatal sleep. The tide had turned. Now they were to ride triumphant on the crest of the advancing wave!

But upon the Boor's Sconce, where the few most keenly interested spectators stood, an intense silence reigned. At the sound of the explosion one quick exclamation had broken from the lips of each person there, but then a deep

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silence had fallen. For they knew that the fact of the explosion having taken place was not everything. The kernel of the whole matter lay in the question as to the effect that explosion had taken upon the redoubtable bridge. Had it occurred too soon it might have battered without making a breach; or by one of those untoward chances so common when explosives are employed, the structure might have almost entirely escaped damage. At that distance it was impossible to estimate the force of the shock. That it had been great was testified abundantly by the effect it had produced upon the city buildings; but had it been great enough to do what was required? Had the fire-ships been as near to the bridge as had been calculated by the mechanicians who had had the adjustment of the fuses? These were questions asked of himself by the anxious Burgomaster; but he spoke no word and made no sign, only stood watching with a sickening sense of anxiety for the rise of the rocket which was to tell them in Antwerp of success, and to be the signal for the start of the Zeeland fleet waiting below at Lillo, and ready with its load of grain and provision for the eager citizens of Antwerp.

That rocket never rose. With an awful sense of crushing despair the watchers upon the Sconce waited and watched. The Italian with the fiery eyes stood as if carved out of stone, and none dared to speak a word to him of the failure of his cherished plan. Hour after hour they waited, first in eager hope, then in strained expectancy, last in dull despair. All around them the city seemed full

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of sound and strife—the people eagerly begging to be allowed to rush to the boats, and dash down to the scene of the explosion, to welcome their allies who would be sailing up to the city; the municipal authorities, who better understood the nature of the undertaking, holding them back, and striving to make them understand that till the Admiral signalled the destruction of the bridge it was not safe to take action of any kind. If the bridge remained unbroken, what use to adventure their lives in the neighbourhood of the furious Spaniards? No; they must wait—wait for the signal—wait for the rise of the rocket. So they waited and waited with sinking hearts, till just before the cold break of day the barges with the Admiral and his rowers returned dejectedly to the city.

Nothing had been done, they declared; the great bridge remained unbroken as before. They had waited till the first effects of the explosion had passed away; for at the first no living soul could breathe the foul air, tainted by the scent of thousands of pounds of gunpowder. Then they had cautiously reconnoitred; but nothing had been done, nothing effected. The bridge stood as before from bank to bank. The Spanish soldiers, undaunted even then, were marching and countermarching upon it, with a wary eye ever on the river, lest an attack by ship should be made. All had been done according to plan; but it had been a gigantic failure. Antwerp was still shut in. Her deliverance had not yet come.

"It is a lie, a lie, a lie!" yelled Gianibelli when the news was at last brought to him; "it is one foul, villan-

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ous lie! I know it, I know it, I know it! The bridge has not escaped! By the soul of the Blessed Virgin I swear it! Do you think, ye fools and dolts, that my work can fail like this? I tell you it is your cowardice that will ruin this city; my work has not failed!—Master Burgomaster, man yon vessels and go down and see. Send up a hundred rockets, to warn them of Zeeland to come to our aid. I tell you, man, the bridge is wrecked; I tell you I know my ships have done their work. Bitterly will you rue the day if you act not now. To your ships, I say, to your ships, and save your city, if you have the heart of a mouse amongst you!"

For a moment Sainte Aldegonde was almost persuaded. He made one step forward as if about to give some order; and then came the fatal pause, as he asked himself what the city authorities would say if he told them he was acting merely in obedience to the frantic commands of the mad Italian wizard. Would they listen? would they obey? He knew that they would but laugh him to scorn for a madman and a fool. Already the revulsion of feeling had come—anger, disappointment, and an angry contempt for the man who had promised such great things, and had only raised their hopes in vain.

The moment for action had passed; nobody would stir hand or foot now. With a gesture almost of despair the Burgomaster shook his head, and slowly, without another word, bad or good, returned to his own house.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT.

DIEGO, on his return to the Spanish camp, had been warmly welcomed by his comrades in arms, and graciously received by Parma himself, who had summoned the young man to his tent, and had questioned him closely as to the condition of the city, the temper of the people, and the probable length of time that they would be likely to hold out against famine and other hardships.

Diego answered all these questions without reserve. He said that at present there appeared to be little real scarcity in the city, although the citizens were learning to be very careful, and to husband their resources assiduously. He said that there was still the same feeling of determination to hold out at all cost; and as he left before the failure of the French negotiation had become known, he reported that they were still very confident that help would be sent them from France, and were as indisposed as ever for surrender.

Parma was almost as ignorant as the burghers of Antwerp as to what would be the result of this long-drawn negotiation, and he was very anxious to bring the siege to

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an end before his prey could escape him; but as he had no force sufficient for any more active measures than those he had taken, he was forced to await with patience the result of the blockade he had succeeded in establishing, and it was something to know that the store of provisions in the city was beginning to show signs of reduction.

Diego told the Prince of the Italian's project of burning or blowing up his bridge by means of fire-ships, but added that the burghers had refused him the necessary munitions, and that the scheme was therefore at an end. The Prince did not believe in the possible destruction of his bridge much more than Antwerp had believed in its construction, and no great heed was given to this narrative. Diego himself fully believed that the whole project had been abandoned, and in the delight and satisfaction of his new freedom and resumption of military duties, he speedily forgot most of the troubles and hardships of his recent lot, and scarcely gave the old Italian and his fire-ships another thought.

Diego was besieged by Rodrigo and Carlos with questions respecting Alphonso, and could only reply that so far as his bodily state went he was far better within the city than in the camp. What was the matter with him Diego did not know; but that he had received some grave injury was evident from the fact that he could not now walk about much or exert himself in any way without bringing on severe pain. The physicians of the city had declared that it was an internal injury which caused this, and that recovery could only take place by means of absolute rest

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and quiet for many months to come. In the house of the burgher folks who had sheltered them he could get this rest; and indeed anything else was out of the question, as he was a prisoner, and seldom left the house except to stroll a short distance through the streets, or to pace the garden to and fro. In reply to Rodrigo's feverish questions, Diego was able to answer that the captive seemed wondrously content, and never chafed against his bonds, as ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have done. Carlos opined that this was the result of physical weakness, and Rodrigo agreed with him. The contents of the letter Alphonso had sent them certainly indicated a mind at ease, and expressed wondrously little impatience at the long captivity. True, it was an inestimable boon that he had no prison hardships to put up with. He was in a house where he received every care, and where the truest kindness was shown to him; but although there was much of satisfaction in that thought under one of its aspects, Rodrigo felt a qualm of anxiety upon another point, and presently asked of Diego,—

"Are these well-meaning people heretics?"

"To the very core—heretics of the most fearless kind, holding meetings within their house, and talking openly such blasphemies against the Holy Church and the Blessed Virgin as would be enough to doom them all to hell fire. I had never thought to have to sit and hear such things spoken. It was enough to make one's hair stand on end!"

"And Alphonso—how did he bear such talk? He was always the first to stand up against evil words in our camp."

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Diego shrugged his shoulders.

"Nay, ask me not; I know not the thoughts of other men. It seemed to me that Alphonso took marvellously kindly to these heretics, one and all. He would listen to their blasphemous talk with his eyes all alight, and when he should have been ready to fling back their false words, and cram them down their throats again, he would ask a question—a question of a heretic, think of it!—and listen with eager attention for the answer. I had never thought to hear such words from any son of Spain as I sometimes heard from him. But I strove to hear as little as I could of these matters. Neither your greasy burghers nor their vile doctrines had any charm for me."

Now that he was once more under the influence of his old associates, Diego's old swagger and assurance were fast returning. It had been noticeable just at first that he spoke more temperately of his adversaries, and he even admitted that he had been well and handsomely treated by them; but this feeling was now wearing off, and he was fast becoming the same reckless, almost ferocious, soldier as of old. His revelations did not tend to soothe the fears Rodrigo and Carlos had entertained respecting their favourite comrade; and Carlos exclaimed in surprise at any such breach of religious discipline from one so well instructed as Alphonso.

"What would you have when a maid's bright eyes are working witchery over a man's soul?" asked Diego, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Those heretics know well how to bait their traps. Alphonso is but a lad, and a hot-

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hearted lad to boot, ready to be inflamed with admiration by the first pretty face he sees. Straight from college to the camp, that has been his life, and a woman is to him a being from an unknown sphere. Can you wonder at the boy, when the fairest maiden of them all is set to lure him with her soft words and sweet smiles?"

This indeed was serious, and the elder men felt it to be so.

"What mean you, Diego? Alphonso speaks here of no woman in particular, only of great goodness received from a whole household."

"I misdoubt me if Alphonso yet knows whither the current is setting," answered Diego with a short laugh. "But I have eyes, if he has not, and Mistress Maud Wilford is pretty enough to turn a wiser head than his; though, for my part, that blonde English beauty is not much to my taste. Give me dark eyes, and a spirit with a spice of the devil in it. Your golden-haired saints pall upon my palate, especially if they be heretics to boot. But, if I mistake me not, the boy is fast losing his heart, and that is why the doctrines of the heretics are so wonderfully palatable to him, whether he knows it or not."

All this was very unwelcome news to Rodrigo and Carlos, who were both proud men, and could not understand how Alphonso could demean himself by stooping to admire a low-born burgher maiden, even though she had some claim to beauty. They would fain have had him back in the camp, even though he might be little fit for his duties there. The peril of leaving him in the city was like to be

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greater than of having him under arms. And as Carlos said, a soldier's death in the service of his country was a hundred times better than a life of sin beneath the ban of the Church, with a heretic maiden as a wife.

However, nothing could be done now, and they had to wait with what patience they might until the fall of the city gave Alphonso back to them. That Antwerp would fall eventually few of Parma's officers seriously doubted. They had boundless confidence in their general. They were by no means so well aware as he himself of the desperate condition into which the army was falling. That the soldiers were ill-fed and ill-paid they knew well —they could not fail to do so; but they were always buoyed up by hopes of speedy and efficient succour from Spain. They did not understand the temper of the monarch they served as well as Parma did, and not even to his chosen friends amongst those who served under his orders did the heroic general betray the anxiety, the almost despair, which often consumed him.

The repulse and disaster at Ostend, and the rapidly-following misfortune at Liefkenshoek, aroused the Spaniards to the consciousness that the victory was not yet theirs. Perhaps some amongst them had been a little apathetic; certainly the commanding officers of the two captured forts had shown a lack of watchfulness and courage, which they expiated with their lives, by the command of the stern general, who spared not himself, and who looked for like devotion from those beneath him. But although the command of the river below was now altogether in the hands

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of the rebels, the bridge yet stood—an invincible barrier between their fortresses and the city. So long as that remained intact, that and the great Kowenstyn Dike, so long was the city at the mercy of the Spaniards. A small advantage here and there might inspire the rebels with hope; but by only one of these two roads could she regain her freedom, and she appeared powerless to organize any efficient scheme for demolishing either of these bulwarks.

But a rumour reached Parma's ears that something was to be done by the citizens at last. The French had openly abandoned them, as he had prophesied; and they were stirred up to some bold step on their own account. It was known that the Zeeland fleet, which had assisted at the capture of Liefkenshoek, was still lying between that fortress and Lillo, as if in readiness for some new undertaking. A messenger sent out to reconnoitre had brought back word that a number of ships laden with provisions were lying with the war-vessels, plainly with the idea of victualling the city. There could be no mistaking from these signs that an attempt was to be made to throw supplies into the town. In order to do this, either the bridge or the Kowenstyn Dike must be threatened. Apparently this time it was the bridge that was to be attempted.

Parma and his men were all on the alert. They had been forced to send away a certain number of soldiers the previous day to erect a new fort on the broken end of the dike which ran straight to Liefkenshoek, or the rebels

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might have taken them at a disadvantage. Diego had been told off for that service, and had acquitted himself manfully there. He and another officer now held the fort with a few hundred men. He was therefore not with the main body encamped round and about the bridge upon this eventful night, although he was scarce two bow-shots distant.

A sudden shout from the sentries posted upon the bridge warned the wakeful general that something had been seen; and calling his officers about him, he sped to the scene of action, although, save for the exclamations of his own men and the hurrying tread of approaching feet, there was nothing to break the silence of the spring night.

The shout from the sentries had been caused by the approach from the direction of the city of one or two small boats. There was certainly nothing alarming in the presence of these little craft, save that they were probably the precursors of larger ones to follow. The call to arms was sounded at once, and along the dikes, as well as upon the bridge, soldiers seemed to spring up as by magic, armed to the teeth, ready and alert, waiting and watching in breathless expectancy for what was to follow.

Nor did they watch in vain. Suddenly, one after another, these little vessels began to glow and sparkle, and to shoot forth tongues of lambent flame. Some of those coming down from above were blazing even as they approached. Soon the banks on both sides of the wide river were lighted up by the lurid glow of the flames, and the

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sullen water reflected the glare, till the whole scene was as bright as day.

A deep silence had fallen upon the multitude along the banks. What was the meaning of this gorgeous but somewhat purposeless display? The small vessels, even though some of them floated straight down upon the raft, burned themselves harmlessly out against its damp sides. Others smouldered, blazed, and went out, still floating peacefully down the river, whilst a proportion grounded against the river-banks, and were at once extinguished by the soldiers, who sprang fearlessly into the water and submerged them.

Parma stood with his little knot of chief officers upon the bridge, anxiously watching the weird scene.

"These be the fire-ships of which Diego told us," he said in low tone; "but if there be nothing worse than these, we may laugh them to scorn. Yet said he not something of larger craft, more cunningly devised than these harmless fire-brands? I misdoubt me that Antwerp would amuse itself with child's play such as this. There will be more to follow."

"See!" cried Carlos, pointing to a distant spot in the river beyond the illuminated circle cast by the flaming skiffs—"see yonder! Is not there some dark object floating down upon us, a hundred times larger than these glow-worms? Yes! I see it plainly. I see it move. It is coming slowly but steadily down. Can this be one of the vessels of which Diego spoke, planned with exceeding skill and cunning by that Italian? No; surely he said

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the Italian would have no more to do with the city when his demands were refused. Likely enough this is but some worthless imitation of what he might have carried out with skill. We have taken the measure of the Dutch burghers. They have not wit to do us much harm with their inventions."

So spoke Carlos, and his words found a ready echo amongst those who stood by; and yet the approach of this great and faintly luminous hulk was watched with such strained interest that for a moment the silence on both sides of the river became significantly intense. The little craft still burning, though not so brightly as before, illumined the strangely picturesque scene. The slow advance of the great hulk, swaying and lurching along as wind or tide caught her, could be plainly seen by all. She was near to the left bank of the river, and was not caught or detained by the protecting raft, but drifted slowly past it, although she did not quite reach the bridge, but ran aground against the dike guarding Kalloo.

"Who will volunteer to board her and extinguish the fires?"

Parma's voice rang out clear and strong in the death-like silence, and it needed but the knowledge that he was watching it all to inspire a score of men—an Englishman at their head—to spring on board the vessel, and commence to scatter the burning brands on deck, and examine into the nature of her construction. A few moments before, a faint and muffled explosion had warned the bystanders that she carried combustibles; but undeterred

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by the thought of personal peril, they commenced diving into the crater with their spears,—and finding that no catastrophe followed, broke into peals of derisive laughter, and made very merry at the ponderous folly of the Antwerp citizens.

"Do they think to scare our Prince with fireworks that would scarce fright a child?" asked one and another contemptuously, as the hapless *Fortune* was soused with water and shown to be perfectly innocuous. "Is it with such trifles and such folly that they pass their time in the city? It is just such another piece of folly as their *Bugaboo*—things to scare children withal!"

"Here comes another!" cried a hundred voices, and a roar of laughter went up from the thousands who stood watching the curious spectacle.

All fear was now at an end. The soldiers had seen enough to have conceived an unmitigated contempt for the efforts their victims were making to secure their freedom. Even Parma's grave face relaxed into a smile as he heard the great shout of laughter, though he was too wise a man to indulge in ridicule before the issue of the day was decided.

At this moment was heard the sound of hurrying feet along the bridge, and Diego dashed out of the darkness and threw himself before Parma.

"My Prince, my general!" he implored, in extraordinarily earnest and imploring accents, "I beg of you to come away. Nay, look not at me so smilingly, nor shake your head. I implore you, my lord, to come away."

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"Nonsense, boy! what has come to you? You are not wont to be scared at trifles."

"Ah, pardon me, my Prince, pardon my importunity; but come! By all that is sacred in heaven and earth, I implore it of you! O my dear lord, turn not away; listen to one who—"

"Tush, boy! I love not these heroics. What has come to you, Don Diego?" questioned Parma hastily; but as he spoke he allowed Diego, who had him fast by the mantle, to lead him off the bridge. Of all things in the world, the Prince was most intolerant of anything approaching a scene; and seeing that Diego was about to fling himself upon his knees before him, he thought better for the moment to let him have his way. He would get rid of his importunate young officer, who appeared to have crossed from his fort in a skiff for the very purpose of dragging him from the scene of action, chide him well for his unseemly impetuosity, and then he would return to see the fate of this other vessel, which, by the exclamations and cries he heard, appeared to have floated straight down upon the bridge itself. He heard the voice of the Marquis Richebourg giving directions to the men to serve it the same as they had served the first; and having reached Fort St. Mary, was just about to turn somewhat sharply upon Diego and ask an explanation from him of his extraordinary conduct, when—

Bang!

No words can describe the fearful and overpowering force of that terrific explosion. One second of blinding

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light, as though the very heavens had been rent, then the blackness of pitchy darkness, whilst the whole earth rocked. A thousand human beings were annihilated in a moment of time; a huge rent in that barrier across the river was torn through and through. The mighty river sank with the concussion almost to its depths, and then rose in a huge wave, sweeping over bridge and dikes, and washing away hundreds of prostrate human forms, dead and living alike, to find a watery grave in its foaming depths. The air was thick with sulphurous vapours, and a rain of cannon-balls, slabs of stone, ploughshares, and every deadly missile that can be imagined fell upon land and water, crushing past recognition hundreds of human forms. The blockhouse where the Marquis of Richebourg had been standing with his band of picked men simply rose in the air and disappeared. The body of the Marquis was subsequently found in the river; but hundreds of others were absolutely torn in pieces by the force of the explosion—mangled trunks, heads, and limbs being afterwards found leagues away from the scene, together with slabs of marble and other projectiles that had been hurled from Gianibelli's "hell-burner."

Well had that vessel deserved its appellation. Judging from the effect produced by the explosion of *one* such ship —and that far smaller than he desired it to be—it is fearful to think what might have been the result had his demand been gratified, and the three large vessels placed at his command. It seems not impossible that Antwerp itself might have been laid in ruins; whilst it is hardly possible

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to conceive anything but absolute annihilation for Parma and his whole army.

The Prince, so wonderfully and providentially taken from the scene of the most imminent peril just in the nick of time, fell to the earth as the explosion and concussion burst upon him, and Diego fell motionless beside him. Not a man within the radius of a mile kept his feet at that awful moment. Many not killed or wounded were lifted up and sent spinning through the air. Some landed on their feet harmlessly, others were projected into the river to sink or swim as they could. One officer was lifted out of a boat on one side of the Scheldt, and set down in another near the opposite shore. Another was lifted up and carried straight across the river, being set down, as it were, upon the opposite bank without having sustained any real injury. The escapes were as wonderful as the destruction; but the number of dead and wounded and dying was fearful to contemplate. For a period that seemed like hours to those who moved still about in the murky atmosphere, scarcely knowing whether they were alive or had passed into another state of existence, it seemed indeed as though all was irretrievably lost; and when these creeping phantoms met each other in the gloom, the same question was on all lips,—

"Where is the Prince? has he escaped with life?"

Thanks to the sudden panic which had assailed Diego when he saw the "hell-burners" slowing bearing down upon the bridge—a panic caused by his remembrance of what had been spoken in his hearing about Gianibelli's

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infernal fire-ships—the Prince of Parma was not killed, as he must inevitably have been had he retained his position by the blockhouse where Diego had found him. Carlos also owed his life to the same accident, for he had followed the Prince, wondering at Diego's unwonted agitation; and the three lay unconscious, close together, for some ten or fifteen minutes, none being able to distinguish them in the murky darkness. Parma's little page, who followed his master with some of his weapons, lay dead at his side, without any visible injury, killed in a moment, as many others had been, by the concussion of the air.

It was Diego who first recovered consciousness, and with a strange sense of oppression sat up and looked about him. It was not quite dark, for the moon was shining in the sky, and despite the thickness of the atmosphere gave a faint and feeble light. He saw the Prince stretched motionless, face downwards, on the ground beside him, and in an awful fear lest he should be dead, he uttered a loud cry.

That cry brought several persons about him, and in a moment every nerve was strained to ascertain whether or not their great general was seriously hurt. That he was not dead was testified by the fact that he uttered a sound like a moan when he was touched; and a surgeon being quickly found and directed to the spot, means were taken to restore him to himself.

In a few minutes these means were successful. Parma had been carried into the little guard-room of the fort close to the gate, and a lamp gave light enough to show

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that there were no grievous wounds or visible contusions upon him. The moment that the general's eyes opened he sat up alert and vigorous, just drank the potation offered to him by his anxious servants, and then almost without a word, and with a strange and tense expression upon his face, strode out to look at the wreck of his bridge, and to take counsel with himself how this crushing blow could be best met.

"Summon every man hither who can yet bear arms!" was his terse command. "We shall have the Zeeland fleet upon us in another hour. To the boats every man that can be spared! Collect every vestige of floating wood and spar. Bring up everything that can be found to repair the breach. Let not a moment be lost. We shall have the enemy upon us with the first streak of day, if they come not before. They shall not even now find us unprepared. They have struck one terrible blow at us to-day, but there is hope yet. Bring every man to the task. Let them not have time to think of what has been done. Every thought must be given to repairing the damage. Not a moment must be lost."

Thus spoke the great general, undaunted even in such an awful hour as the present—his labour of months shattered by a single blow, a thousand of his soldiers blown into the air, hundreds lying dead or dying round and about him, the rest suffering in greater or less degree from the fearful panic engendered by the awful sight they had witnessed. If the citizens of Antwerp had had but one such master-mind within their walls, and if the tide of

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democracy had let the city listen to the voice of one wise ruler instead of being swayed by the capricious will of an ignorant and obstinate multitude, how different her fate might have been! With everything against him, with hope almost dead, with the prospect of attack both from above and below, and his army fearfully shattered and panic-stricken, Alexander Farnese with indomitable energy set instantly to work to make the most of every second of time that remained to him before the approach of the foe. How different was it with the Antwerp burghers! With everything in their favour, they could not be induced to move. They had put their trust in an utterly untrustworthy man, and because he failed them all was lost. Runaway Jacob had never more richly deserved his name than on the present occasion. Terrified by the explosion, and by the awful after effects which were felt and heard right up to the city walls, the cowardly Admiral had not even taken the trouble to go himself to see the result of the earthquake. He had despatched some of his attendants in a barge, and these worthies, taking their cue from their leader, had hardly gone any distance off, but after rowing about for a while in the murky blackness, afraid for their lives to approach any nearer to the bridge in case another explosion should take place, had returned to their master with the report that the bridge remained intact, and that the attempt had been an utter failure. Thus was Antwerp defrauded of her victory, whilst the Zeeland fleet below waited in vain for the preconcerted signal, and finally sailed away disappointed and discouraged.

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The April dawn rose chill and drear over a strange scene of desolation. A great rent two hundred feet wide yawned in the redoubtable bridge. It had been cleft through and through by the terrific force of the explosion. The protecting rafts were greatly injured and displaced. A glance showed that a fleet from above or below could sweep fearlessly through the breach; and Parma scanned the waves with anxious eyes, every moment expecting to see the sails of the approaching squadron that was, as he well knew, lying in readiness by Lillo. But look as he would he saw no sign of the fleet; and with a cheerful aspect, though in reality almost in despair (for he felt certain that every hour would bring the enemy upon him), he set about encouraging his weary and stricken troops to repair the breach and make ready against the coming attack.

It was a ghastly spectacle indeed upon which the morning sun rose. The bridge and the river-banks were strewn with mangled corpses. The men at their work in the river, collecting spars and fragments of all kinds, and striving to make a temporary barrier across the breach till more substantial work could be accomplished, kept dragging to light ghastly human remains, the bare sight of which was enough to arouse a shudder of horror. But the spirit of the general infused itself into his men; and since he would not sit down in despair to wait for what all believed now to be inevitable—namely, the speedy demolition of the bridge—they were ready and willing to imitate him, and the rapidity with which the work of repair was carried on was marvellous.

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When this was really set on foot in a workmanlike manner, the general was able to patrol from rank to rank and station to station, encouraging and praising his men, seeing that the wounded were cared for as well as circumstances would allow, and eagerly greeting from time to time the various officers he had hardly dared hope to see again, as these met him upon his rounds.

Rodrigo's escape had been very narrow. He had been whirled into the air, till, as he expressed it, he felt in his bewilderment as though he had been changed into a cannon-ball; and the sense of fear or even of surprise vanished as utterly as though he had been dreaming the incident, not experiencing it in the flesh. After being thus propelled for a considerable distance by the concussion in the air, he had suddenly been dropped from a great height, and fully expected to meet his death as soon as he touched the ground. Fortunately for him, however, he fell clear into the river, and as there was a boat near at hand he succeeded in saving himself with no great difficulty. He had been burned and singed about the head and shoulders, but was not otherwise injured. Carlos had escaped with only a few contusions, and Diego had not been seriously hurt, though almost every man within the camp had been shaken or bruised in some way, even if not actually wounded. Some were made deaf, others blinded by the shock; and though most of these recovered in time, there were others who were permanently disabled from active service through the loss of some faculty.

And then there was always the haunting fear in the

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minds of all that another of these "hell-burners" might be sent down upon them from the city. Inexplicable as it was to the Spaniards that they had not been attacked by a great force at the moment of their greatest helplessness, they speedily found they were not to be left altogether in peace. A swarm of little vessels was now continually pestering them and hindering their work. The soldiers went in terror of their lives lest each night should bring a repetition of the fearful tragedy which had swept off a thousand men in a moment of time. Crippled in numbers, and forced to a perpetual watchfulness, the exhausted soldiers had scarcely time to eat or sleep. A new patrol had to be organized in case of any further attack from fire-ships, and night and day men in barges, armed with hooks and scythes, were kept rowing up and down to protect the raft and bridge from the assault of any such deadly foes.

"I marvel they do not send us another such infernal messenger," said Parma one day, as he sat for a brief moment of leisure with his officers about him. "Had they followed up that first 'hell-burner' with another like it, my work could not have stood. They are an inexplicable people—full of courage, obstinacy, tenacity, and rebellion; a people who will do and dare anything, and accomplish much by the aid of an ingenuity that is more than human; and yet when they have won some great advantage, they throw it away as a child a broken toy. It must be that the holy saints are watching over us to protect us. Our Lady in Heaven has us beneath her special protection, and rends the fruit of their toil from

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the greedy maw of these heretics ere they have tasted the sweets of it."

"I truly believe that this is so," answered Rodrigo piously; and in his heart he added earnestly, "Would that Alphonso may see it likewise in such light! He is not a scoffer, nor thoughtless, like some. Sure he must see that the very heavens are fighting against yon heretic crew, and his folly will die a natural death. He cannot believe that were Heaven with these people all their endeavours would be thus brought to naught."

The Spaniards perhaps forgot that by the same method of reckoning Heaven's favours they might themselves have reason to doubt the righteousness of their cause. A terrible blow had been struck against them, even though all that might have been had not been accomplished. They had lost some of their best and bravest officers—men whom it was impossible to replace, and whose death was a source of unmixed sorrow to Parma, who knew not where to turn for others. They were in sore straits themselves, without money, sometimes almost without food, and apparently forgotten by their autocratic master in Spain. They had been for a generation striving to subdue this little territory, which seemed as though it could not hold out against the mighty power of Spain for a single year; and although some parts of the country had submitted, the struggle was being gallantly maintained by the bolder states of Holland and Zeeland, and these rebellious provinces were flourishing in exact proportion as the reconciled ones languished and grew poor and helpless. But this was a

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view of the case which the Spaniards of that day would not and perhaps could not take. They were ready enough to attribute their own successes to the intervention of a favouring Heaven, but their misfortunes were never regarded as being a sign of the withdrawal of divine favour.

In that, perhaps, they differed not so much from fanatics of every age; but it is not well to speak mockingly of their trust in Providence, even though somewhat childishly displayed. It was real devotion that inspired many of them with a courage as high as any their foes could show; and the same devotion and courage were exhibited in large measure upon the side of the rebels, who were equally sure that the God of Heaven was fighting on their side, even though man and the devil were allowed for a time to tempt and try them.

It has always been the way, ever since religious wars have been in the earth, and will be to the end. And no man in those days could clearly see that whilst the Church was at war with itself, and brethren baptized into the One Name were flying at each other's throats, no one cause could be said to be altogether pure or holy, or looked upon by the God of peace with entire favour. Truly He fights on the side of right; but He works no miracles in favour of His blind and erring children, even though they be seeking for liberty and light. He holds the balances with a justice and impartiality that is almost terrible to man, and only little by little, slowly and painfully, is the end worked out.

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The struggle between tyranny and liberty, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, was being slowly worked out in the history of the Netherlands—slowly and painfully, with many a dark episode to blot the page that should have been bright, with many errors to stain a cause that professed so much that was noble and good. The same battle is going ceaselessly on in the world around us, with the same anomalies, confusion, and bitterness. The end is coming upon us in God's time; and what will that end be?

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CHAPTER XIX.

LOVE IN WAR.

"IT did not fail—I know it did not fail!" Such was the constant cry of the Italian mechanician during the days which followed that night of tense excitement in which his "hell-burners" had been sent forth against Parma's great bridge—which attempt had been declared throughout the city to have ended in utter failure.

The people of Antwerp were angry and bitterly disappointed, and were disposed to mob the old man every time he appeared in the streets, shouting opprobrious words at him and ridiculing those promises of his which they believed to have been nothing but idle boastings.

Gianibelli's rage and fury knew no bounds; and in his heart of hearts the Burgomaster shared his belief that some new gigantic blunder had been made by the thick-skulled Admiral to whom had been intrusted so important a share in the night's proceedings. He had personally interviewed Jacobzoon, and had spoken both to him and the men who accompanied him. As was natural under the circumstances, they had got a well-planned and circumstantial tale to tell, —a tale that satisfied the city authorities and raised no

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suspicions in their minds; but it was far from satisfying Sainte Aldegonde. He detected false notes here and there; he observed a certain hesitancy on the part of the men when bidden to describe their approach to the bridge and the appearance it presented. He had so strong a suspicion that they had not really ascertained the true state of affairs that he would, had he been the only person to decide the matter, have organized upon the following day a strong and resolute attack upon the bridge and upon Parma's camp at Kalloo, trusting to the Zeelanders to hear the sound of fighting and to come to their aid. But, alas! the Burgomaster had no power to act with independence. All such matters had to go before the Board of Schepens, and they would not hear of such a thing. They had had enough of failure for one week, they said, and to attempt to attack a bridge which had withstood the terrific explosion of that gigantic fire-ship would be nothing short of madness. Not one of the Magistrates would listen; they were as full of contempt for the Italian and his high-sounding words as he was for their dull wits and capacity for blundering.

"I know my work was no failure," he asserted, with passionate emphasis, as his rage was kept at boiling-point by the jeers of the ignorant citizens whenever he appeared in the streets. "I know it did not fail. It could not. Would to Heaven I could go thither and learn the truth for myself! Did I not say that that fool of an Admiral would ruin all? and have not my words been abundantly verified?"

Upon the evening of the third day, when Malcolm

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was supping with the Italian and his daughter, the youth looked suddenly up to say,—

"Sir, if you will give me the hand of your daughter in marriage on my return, I will to-night swim once more down upon the bridge and discover all you wish to know. I will bring you word again what your fire-ships accomplished. But if I do this thing a second time, there must be no dallying about the reward. Veronica must be mine. I shall have won her by a right too strong to be disputed. Tell me that you will do this for me, and I will forth at once upon my task."

A sudden fire leaped into Gianibelli's eyes. He held out his skinny hand across the table and grasped that of the young man.

"Bring me back word that the bridge is rent in twain, and I give you my daughter's hand in marriage so soon as you will.—Veronica, you hear my promise! I never yet took back my word. If he brings me glad tidings, if he can show that my work was no failure, I give him thy hand as his reward. Dost understand, child? There must be no drawing back on thy part. Thy father's word is pledged. Mine honour is at stake. I have pledged my whole reputation upon the success of my 'hell-burners.'—Bring me word that they have done their work, and I give thee my daughter's hand in wedlock."

This was just such an act of melodramatic autocracy as was dear to the heart of the Italian. In his own house he was a veritable tyrant, and he regarded his daughter very much as an Oriental regarded his—as a chattel of which

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he could dispose at will. He loved Veronica as much as it was in him to love anything human; but that did not interfere with his theory that women were little better than slaves in the hands of the men whom they owned as husband or father. Perhaps the fact that Veronica and Malcolm were sincerely attached to each other weighed unconsciously with him as he spoke; but to hear him speak one would have supposed that he regarded nothing but the satisfaction of his own curiosity, and that his daughter's feelings were of no account.

When he had finished speaking he rose suddenly from the table and retired precipitately into his own little den, where most of his time was spent brooding over the folly of mankind in general and of Antwerp in particular; and the young people thus left together looked quickly into each other's eyes, whilst Veronica stretched out her hand and laid it on his arm, saying imploringly,—

"O Malcolm, do not adventure yourself thus another time!"

"Nay, but why not? I came back safe and sound the last time; and at this season the chill will be far less. And I know my way better now. I—"

"Thou wilt fall a second time into the hands of the foe, and this time thou mayest not escape!" cried Veronica in distress. "Nay, Malcolm, I cannot bear that thou shouldest thus endanger thyself again for the sake of my father. The first time there was some good end for thine own city to be achieved. It was an act of patriotism to go then; but here is no such motive. What good will it

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be to the people to hear the news, even if my father is right, and if the bridge was broken? The Prince of Parma never rests nor sleeps. By this time he will have fortified it and made all sure once more. Thou wilt risk thy life, and for no good."

"Nay, but it will be for good if this prove to have been as we think!" answered Malcolm with flashing eyes. "It will teach our obstinate burghers that they do but let themselves be tricked and fooled by the men they intrust with their most important offices. It will teach them that they would do well to trust their noble Burgomaster, whose voice is always raised on the side of wisdom, albeit they will not listen to him when he takes their contrary part. Oh, it would give me a keen joy to return with the news that yon great bridge was cleft in twain! Methinks it would rouse all Antwerp to a passion of fury and patriotic zeal. Once let the city awake, once let her throw off her apathy and her timidity, and I believe we could yet win our freedom. If it prove to have been as thy father and as some of us suspect—if those mighty floating volcanoes did really do their appointed work, and Antwerp lost all through the coward faithlessness of one man—why, then methinks the city will arise as a giant in his wrath, and will show the world what she can yet do. Were it for that alone, I would go, Veronica; but I have another motive goading me on. Sweetheart, thou didst hear his words; methinks they were too solemnly spoken to be taken back. Thou art now my betrothed bride. When I return with good news, wilt thou be ready to wed

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with me, and to come with me some day to England, whither we seriously purpose to go so soon as this long siege be finished?"

She looked up with a question in her eyes.

"To England, Malcolm? is that decided?"

"I think truly that it is; at least I verily believe that we Wilfords shall all go thither, as indeed we have often planned to do, since our trade with that land is so much increased. I know not so well if the Van der Hammers will accompany us; they talk rather of settling at Delft or at the Hague. Holland is like to become the most prosperous of all these provinces; for her resolve to hold out against the tyranny of Spain is deeper rooted than in these lands here, which have already half submitted themselves again. It comes to this, Veronica: we have almost ceased to hope that this city will be able to withstand the conquering arm of Parma. From time to time hope revives; but then, again, comes some disaster which robs us of our confidence once more, and the best thing to hope appears to be that we may win easy terms of capitulation from our foe. We know what these terms are like to be. Those who will not put their necks beneath the yoke of the Papacy must flee the country within two years. That then will be our fate. It is better, as Lionel has long foreseen, to face this possibility first as last, and for some time we have been working with a view to returning to England in a family when the crisis comes. Harold is there already, making a home to which we can all go in the first place whilst matters are being arranged. Our father is

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also there, with his good business head, and I doubt not much has by this time been done. We can carry on our business as well there as here; and I trow we shall quickly learn to love a land which we have always spoken of as home, because our parents have called it so. Veronica, canst thou face the thought of going thither with us? Will England be a home to thee if thy husband takes thee there?"

She looked at him with a soft light in her dark eyes, and answered softly,—

"Any place would be home to me if thou wert there, Malcolm."

He had thought she would speak of her father and the difficulty she might have in leaving him, but no such words passed her lips; and as she met the questioning glance of his eye, she answered the unspoken thought,—

"Methinks he will not want me soon. He has ever some new restless plan in his head; and now he is bent on travelling in the East so soon as he can get free from this beleaguered city, to pick up stores of new lore there. He has spoken many times of placing me within some convent, to be out of his way. Methinks he would be well pleased now were I to take the veil."

"Thou canst do better than that, Veronica!" cried Malcolm ardently; "thou canst take a husband instead. Sweetheart, I was inclined to marvel at the readiness with which he promised thy hand, when two months back he was so loath to listen to my pleadings."

"He had not then bethought him of this new project

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which now is filling his head. And then I truly think he would sooner shut me in a nunnery than give my hand in wedlock. He is not a lover of the Church, as some men are, but he thinks the cloister life a safe one for women. It may be he is right; yet I have never loved the thought. Ah, Malcolm, how happy might we be in England—in that free country—together! It is like some beautiful dream—too bright ever to become true. But, oh, that swim! My love, I know not how to let you go. Suppose you fell once again into the enemy's hand?"

"Well, I have been before into the den of the lion, and have come forth unscathed; why should not I do so again?"

"Ah, but none can foresee the issues of such matters! Perchance they will be deeply angered by the work of the fire-ships. Perchance thou mightest fall into the hands of rough soldiers, who would run thee through with their swords before thou couldst speak a word, bad or good. Oh, I fear to let thee go—I fear it! Malcolm, it is too sore a peril to run for so small an object. In time we *must* learn whether or no my father was right. Why not wait till then?"

But Malcolm was not thus to be dissuaded. He was almost as keenly interested in the issue of that night's work as Gianibelli himself, and he was too naturally fearless to let the thought of personal risk deter him. He had a shrewd suspicion that whatever had happened to the bridge itself, the Spanish camp must have had a tre-

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mendous shock, and for a brief while, at least, would be somewhat disorganized, if not demoralized. He had good hopes of being able this time to accomplish both journeys in safety. The tide would again serve him both ways; and he intended to tell no living soul of his attempt, save only the Italian and his daughter, to whom the offer had been made.

He contented himself with sending a message home that he should not be sleeping there that night; and as there was nothing very remarkable in this, it excited no anxiety and little remark.

In the house in Hooch Straet there was much grave discussion going on just now with reference to the future. Lionel had heard, after very long delay, from his father and brother in England—the letter having gone to friends in Holland first, and having gradually made its way from hand to hand till it reached Joris when he had been on one of his rapid and perilous journeys through the Spanish lines. This letter gave very good news of the absent ones. They had established themselves in a roomy and comfortable house not far from the important seaport town of Harwich. They seemed already to be feeling very much at home. They had been hòspitably and kindly received by the people of England, and there was every hope that a flourishing mercantile business might be established there. The letter spoke in warm terms of the religious liberty allowed to subjects in that realm, although there was still a certain amount of persecution of Anabaptists and certain obscure sectarian heretics whom it was difficult

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to classify. But there was no such espionage or intolerance there as the people of the Netherlands had revolted from in such loathing and disgust; and although the English Queen had not as yet made up her mind to engage in open warfare with the most powerful monarch in the world, by taking up the cause of the Provinces, yet the feeling of the nation was one of great sympathy with the revolted people, and refugees were most kindly and hospitably received. To the beleaguered family in Antwerp these accounts of English life were strangely fascinating. Already the idea of returning to what he always called his native land had strongly possessed Lionel. There was an opening there for a great trade. For some years the family had been contemplating some such step, and making preparation accordingly. Now the plan had taken a definite shape, and was talked of openly. The only point yet uncertain was whether or not the Van der Hammers would accompany their partners to England, or would migrate to Holland and take up their residence there.

Alphonso naturally heard much of this discussion, and gradually it dawned upon him that the heavy-heartedness which he was conscious had lately grown upon him was due in a great measure to the thought that when this family finally quitted the Netherlands he would never see any of them again.

And why should that thought trouble him? He asked that question of himself with stern impatience, but was half afraid to look into his own heart for the answer. Since the departure of Diego, some two months back, Al-

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phonso had had no one to watch his actions in a critical spirit, or to remind him of the perils and pitfalls into which he might be falling.

The young soldier, debarred from the profession of arms, and obliged by the state of his health to live a very quiet life, had not unnaturally taken to reading as a pastime; and the books which he found in the house of the Antwerp merchant were of a kind very different from anything he had ever read before. At first he had been half afraid to open the ponderous Bible that lay upon the table, or even to touch any of those controversial pamphlets and works which had begun to foment the dispute between priest and people, and to set the religious world in a blaze. But curiosity had got the better of scruple at last, and Alphonso had read eagerly everything the house contained, often taking up the cudgels on behalf of his own party in the Church, and arguing many a knotty point with Lionel or his father-in-law.

The not unnatural result of all this had been an immense widening of the mental and spiritual horizon of the young man. Whilst still revering and holding sacred a very great deal that he had been taught by his own spiritual advisers, he had come to the unalterable conclusion that they did not hold the faith in all purity, and that they did not teach the whole truth to their followers. Whether or no the reformed party might not fall into a like error on the other side he did not at that moment care to consider. He had no intention of formally joining them, and even the thought of such a thing would have

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filled him with horror still. But he began to understand their outlook—to see that they had a fund of argument upon their own side which it was not easy to meet on all points; and he also discovered, greatly to his surprise, that with the more truly enlightened and liberal of these heretics there was an immense area of religious belief common alike to them and to the Romanist party. Sometimes it seemed to him, in talking with Lionel or with Maud—and it was with these two that he spoke most readily and with most pleasure—that if he avoided the doctrine of the divinity (as it practically came to) of the Virgin Mary and the universal sovereignty of the Pope, with its many dependent notions, he could talk with the most perfect accord over almost all other doctrinal points. He did not realize how he had gradually come to see matters from a different standpoint; he fancied he had always held the wider view he now did. He began to marvel at the bitterness with which the heretics were regarded, and it was only when he was gravely and almost sternly rebuked by the priest, to whom he confessed from time to time, for some words which seemed to him most harmless and orthodox, that he realized how far he had wandered from the beaten track, and how far he was from the ordinary standpoint of those amongst whom his lot in life was like to be passed.

The father had no wish to be hard on the youth, and made allowance for his position in a heretic household, but he warned him very gravely that a repetition of such words as he had then spoken would doom him to the cells

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of the Inquisition, were they spoken in Spain; and since it began to appear patent to Alphonso that a soldier's life could never again be his, and that upon his release a return to his own country would be the only thing possible for him, it was natural that he should listen to this warning with a thrill of horror. Was he, after all, next door to a heretic? and if so, what use to return to a country where heresy was expiated at the stake, and suspicion sent the suspected person to the rack?

These questions had been before the young man's mind for some while already, and he had not found the answer yet. What should he do when the end of the siege left him free to go about his own business? Would he hail his liberty with rejoicing? He felt in his heart that he should not. Why this was so he had scarcely dared to ask himself; but the answer could not long be hidden from him.

The definite plan of action now settled upon by the Wilford family, as soon as the siege should have terminated either one way or the other, acted as a cheering elixir upon them. They seemed now to have something to look forward to and to hope for, and an air of bustle and preparation already pervaded the house. Even that was a relief from the monotony of those dreary winter days; and as the sun gained more power, and the severity of the winter's cold yielded to the milder influences of spring, the family began to resort once more to the long living-room upstairs; and it was there that Alphonso found Maud upon the evening when Malcolm was about to make his second

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expedition to the bridge, sorting piles of household linen, the product of their busy wheels, and planning how best it could be stowed in some great cases which stood open upon the floor.

"Why, fair Mistress," said the young man with a smile, "one would think that the siege was at an end, and that already you were about to sally forth to seek a new country."

Maud smiled a little as she replied brightly,—

"It is Roosje's wish that we get forward with our preparations, since our minds are now made up. It gives occupation alike to the brain and the fingers; and in these days of uncertainty, hope, and fear, it is well to be ready for anything that may come. Why, it was but a week ago that we hoped to have been free ere this; and some day, perchance, this hope may suddenly become a reality. There is a great stirring all through the city; and now that the Zeeland fleet, with its loads of provisions, lies so close to our walls, I cannot but think some further effort will be made ere we let them sail away again. If once our gates stood open, and we could come and go at will, I know we should long to be off at once, and should be glad that all our goods and chattels stood ready packed, and could quickly be put on board one of our own vessels to be carried to England."

"And you are glad to think of going thither, Mistress Maud?"

"Yes, I am very glad. Since our mother died, and since so many have gone, this house is but a sad place for

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the rest; and though I have loved this city where I was born, we have suffered so much during this cruel war that I shall say adieu with joy to its towers and spires, and to the country likewise. So long as we all go together—that is what I care for. And I think we shall not part company at the first, whatever afterwards happens. Methinks the Vader will at least visit England and see our father again, even though he may return to Holland to settle. One cannot but look forward with rejoicing to the day when we may all sail away from this unhappy and downtrodden land to one where peace and liberty may be found. Ah, Señor, your King has much to answer for; and, perchance, when he has wrought his will and desolated and devastated to his wicked heart's content, he will look back and see the ruin he has caused, and his heart will reproach him for the measureless misery he has inflicted upon hundreds and thousands of hapless human beings, whose only crime has been that they love God, and would worship him in spirit and in truth."

Alphonso's face was very grave. Six months ago he would have stood up to defend the monarch he served, and have shown that the fault lay with the rebels; but to-night he could not think of this, nor even try to point out that there was at least another side to the picture. He could not, in fact, take his mind from the personal aspect of affairs in the future, and he asked in a very low voice,—

"And when you go forth from this city, what will become of me? Will you take me with you?"

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She gave him a quick glance of surprise, and her colour rose slightly as she met the glance bent upon her.

"Oh no, Señor; you will no longer be a prisoner then. You will be free to go whither you will. If your Prince forces us to capitulate, of course you will be freed as a matter of treaty; and if not—if we force him to raise the siege—I am certain that my brother will give you your liberty before we go hence. You are not an enemy to us now, you know. And so soon as he is free of this city he will be free to send you whither he will and you desire."

Alphonso made one step nearer; his heart was beating strangely.

"And suppose I do not desire my liberty—suppose I have no wish for my freedom—what then?"

She looked up in perplexity.

"I scarce understand your meaning, Señor. Every man desires liberty."

"That depends, sweet lady. There are some bonds that be so sweet one fears to break them;" and then seeing the burning blush that dyed her face, and noting how close he was coming to the declaration that he had not yet made up his mind to make, he added quickly, "And of what avail would my liberty be to me, think you? Whither could I go, since I am too poor a creature, as all these wise physicians tell me, to wield a sword or manage a charger again for many a long day?"

"Sure you would have a welcome in your own country, Señor?" she answered, with her eyes on the ground. It

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was growing too dusk for any further work; but the twilight seemed favourable for confidential talk.

"I know not that," he answered; "I have no kith nor kin save my brother, and he will never leave the army whilst there is any fighting to be done. And he may not even be living now, so many are the chances of war. And then my priest has warned me that in mine own country I shall rank as a heretic, or at least as a suspect. Mistress Maud, would you have me go back to the embraces of the Holy Office?"

The colour ebbed away from her face as she looked at him with a great fear and horror in her eyes.

"O Señor, no!" she cried, "oh no, no, no! But what mean you? You are no heretic! What could they say against you?"

"Enough to send me to the stake, lady, inasmuch as I have read the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue, and have discoursed points of doctrine with those whom our priests call heretics. I too have spoken words that would condemn me as a heretic myself. In Spain my life and liberty would not be safe for an hour."

"O Señor, then go not thither!" pleaded Maud with sudden earnestness. "Why should you thus imperil yourself? Do not, do not go thither. Is there no other place where thou couldst flee for shelter?"

"Verily there is England, that land of refuge from tyranny and oppression. Methinks in days to come men will see that she was a wondrous country in these dark and stormy days. From what I hear of her Queen and

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her Church, I should find safety and shelter there—the established faith of the land being something betwixt the old Papacy which men have grown weary of and these new opinions which are something too strong for us all. By what I have heard of late, England would be my safest refuge; but it is sad work going alone to a strange land, without a friend in the world to give one a welcome or a blessing."

Maud's head was bent over her piles of snowy linen; her words were softly and shyly spoken.

"Could you not come with us, Señor? Methinks my brother would give you a safe passage in the vessel which will carry us. Once there, surely you would not be long in finding friends. There must be noble countrymen of yours at the Court of the Queen. And they say that she is very gracious to any noble youth who comes thither and asks to serve her."

"So I have heard. I might do worse than proffer my poor services. I would sooner draw my sword for a brave Queen such as she has ever been, than for the monarch I have tried so long to reverence and respect. But art sure I should be welcome to go thither in your company? Are you not weary of the presence of the stranger amongst you?"

"Nay, Señor; have we shown ourselves weary? Nor are you now a stranger to us; and if your sojourn here has led you to those opinions which in your land would be branded as heresy, methinks the least that we can do is to strive to take you safely away from the reach of the arm

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of the terrible Inquisition. In England, God be thanked, there is no such terrible institution. But here your king has vowed to establish it, though he kill every living soul on this soil first."

Maud felt safer when giving the conversation a general rather than a personal tone, for she was almost as much afraid of hearing Alphonso break into any open declaration of love as he was of being betrayed into such a declaration. Each secretly knew by this time that a great love had grown up betwixt them during these past months; but each was afraid of any overt act which should break the sweetness of the silent harmony which was such happiness to both. Maud felt almost certain that her family would strenuously oppose any union with a Spaniard, a Romanist, and a man of birth so much higher than her own, even if he were to ask her hand in marriage; and he on his part was altogether uncertain whether his position entitled him to think of marrying, and whether he should ever be able to make this girl happy as his wife.

A struggle there had been with his pride at the outset, when he found himself losing his heart to one who was after all but a burgher maiden, although he had gathered that the Wilfords sprang from a good old English stock, and were more highly born than their friends the Van der Hammers. But this had long since given way before the conviction that Maud herself was worthy in every way of his love, and that she was the only woman in the world to whom his heart could ever be given.

But there were other obstacles in the way. At present

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he was a prisoner—that alone was bar enough to any declaration of love—and he did not know whether he should ever be a sound man again, or whether this obscure injury from which he still suffered much might not bring about his death in some sudden and unexplained way, as was so often the case with internal injuries in days when medical science was in its infancy. Then there was the religious difficulty. He was not yet prepared to own himself a member of any church save that of Rome; and although he had taken the first step along a road which so often led to rank heresy, he was by no means in his own opinion a heretic yet. Although he and Maud could talk for long hours upon religious themes and find themselves in accord, he was uncertain that there might not be depths beyond where some chasm might open between them. He realized his own nature and hers well enough to be aware that there could be little happiness for them in the future if they married and then found themselves at variance. The sacrifice of his own pride he was willing to make, but he would not sacrifice her happiness; all the chivalry of his nature revolted against such an idea. The more he grew to love her, the more he felt the difficulties that might lie before them. To take her to Spain was simply out of the question—that he had faced long ago, and it had then seemed to put the matter beyond all power of adjustment; but since he realized that Spain was scarcely now a safer place for him than it would be for her, a new element had come into the question. If they both went to England, and he succeeded in selling his share

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of the old family estate and getting the money transferred to England, what then? The idea had only recently suggested itself, and this was the first word he had spoken to anybody on the subject. He was afraid to pursue the thought in his own heart—afraid lest some rash word should escape him which might shatter for ever the tranquillity which still existed between them. That this tranquillity and reticence must some day be broken he was well aware, but he did not wish that day to come yet. She was as nervously anxious as he could be to preserve the silence betwixt them and live on still in her dream. It was such happiness to think that he might accompany them to England, that she wished to hear nothing more then. She could not but guess at the feelings which were exercising him, but she would not for worlds that they should be spoken; it was far, far sweeter to let them remain an open secret between them. So it was a relief to them both to hear Roosje calling them down to supper. Maud fled away with burning cheeks, and spoke no word to Alphonso again that night.

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CHAPTER XX.

ANTWERP AROUSED.

ALL the city was in a tumult. Crowds were hastening to the open spaces in the city. Rage, excitement, and fury were in every face. Violent words and oaths escaped from every mouth. And rising above the tumult, rising in a great ceaseless roar, the name of the Admiral Jacobzoon—the opprobrious title "Koppen Loppen"—was shouted in every accent of rage, contempt, and derision. One great mob was directing itself towards the house in which that worthy was known to have taken up his abode, and in a few moments not a whole window remained in that house; and the terrified inhabitants had been obliged to flee from it by the back way, fearful lest the angry mob should break in and murder them then and there.

The Burgomaster himself had had to come with some troopers to disperse the crowd, and in their fury the mob had almost turned upon him. For a few moments he had really been in danger; but Lionel had hastily summoned together those of his militia who seemed amenable to discipline, had dashed in at the head of this handful of men, and

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rescued the Burgomaster from their clutches. There was no sense in the madness which had led the mob to turn upon Sainte Aldegonde; but an angry crowd is the cruellest as well as the most senseless force in creation. A grievous wrong had been inflicted upon the city, and public feeling required a victim. If the real culprit could not be found, some other great man must serve instead. It mattered not that if the city had done as the Burgomaster suggested, all might even then have been well, despite the cowardice of the cowardly Admiral. It mattered not that it was the people themselves who had given the power to the Admiral, and had refused to listen to the arguments used against his fitness for the task. They might be the blunderers, but their Burgomaster was a fair victim. He was called their ruler, and was held responsible for disaster, although he had scarce any power to prevent it. Thus it is always where the voice of the people prevails. Unfit to govern themselves, they will hear no advice from those who are fit, and when disaster falls, are the first to blame, not themselves—no, never themselves—but those who would have advised them for their good had they but listened. It has been so a thousand times before, and will be so to the end of the world. The story of the siege of Antwerp forms only a characteristic page of the history of democracy.

For now the whole truth was known. Malcolm's journey this time had been crowned with success. He had gone and returned in safety. He had swum all about the bridge, dived beneath it, seen exactly the extent of the

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damage inflicted, and had returned with the report that a huge breach had been made right through the great barrier, and that had the fleets from Zeeland and Antwerp only combined that night, as they would have done had the signal been given, the whole structure might have been swept away, and Antwerp rejoicing in her freedom.

The howl of rage and execration which arose from the whole city as this piece of news was made known may better be imagined than described. A hot and indignant message had come in from Count Hohenlo, who had also sent a swimmer from Fort Lillo to ascertain the real state of the case, and had made a like discovery. He bitterly upbraided the folly of the city in intrusting such an all-important task to a man who had before betrayed such lamentable cowardice. He boldly declared that the Admiral deserved nothing but hanging; and the Burgomaster was secretly of the same opinion. However, it was not exactly his business to execute summary justice upon the offender. He had other matters to think of then; for the supply question was becoming very difficult in the city by this time, and unless relief came shortly it seemed as though nothing but starvation lay before them.

His first visit was to Gianibelli.

The Italian sat, as was his wont, in his dark den, and in his dark cavernous eyes a great light was shining. As the Burgomaster entered he raised a thin brown hand and pointed it full at him.

"Ha, ha, Master Burgomaster! has the news reached you? What said Gianibelli to you when there was yet

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time? That that fool, that thrice-accursed fool, would ruin everything, had he the chance! And has he not done so? What did I say again as we stood upon the Sconce that night, saw the sky cleft in twain by a sheet of flame, and heard the roar which shook the very earth to her foundations—what did I say then? Did I not say that the work had been done; that all was well; that Antwerp had but to signal the Zeeland fleet and sail triumphantly to meet it and demolish the bridge? Who was right—the despised Italian wizard, or the all-wise Antwerp burghers? Fools, fools—a city of fools! What come you to me for now, Master Burgomaster?"

"I come to say this: Make but such another hell-burner as you made before; the materials shall be at your service this very day, and the whole city shall be your servants to carry on the work with the utmost despatch. Make but one other such vessel, and we will hurl into the air the remainder of Parma's bridge and of his army; the name of Gianibelli shall go down to posterity as—"

But the old man sprang to his feet with flashing eyes and gestures of withering scorn.

"Think you I will raise a finger for Antwerp again?" he almost yelled. "Think you that I have not had enough of your blundering, your blind folly, your obstinate, senseless ridicule? *My* work has been done. *My* name will live as that of the man who could wreck the great bridge of the great Alexander. Think you I will raise another finger for your blind, blundering burghers, who will ruin everything—everything—everything with

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their inconceivable folly? I will not. I say I will not! Let Antwerp make her own fire-ships; let her take her own course! I will do nothing for her more—nothing, nothing! Let her meet the doom she has brought upon herself! Richly she merits it. Let her reap even as she has sown!"

It was useless to try to move the angry old man. He would not listen to argument or supplication. Nor could the Burgomaster greatly wonder at this. Had he not been hampered in all his dealings at the outset, treated with parsimony and ridicule by the whole city, and hooted in the streets as he went by for a man who promised but could not perform? Was it likely he would risk a repetition of such treatment? Was it likely he would love the nation which had acted thus? Even Sainte Aldegonde began to have a superstitious feeling that everything planned by this luckless city for its deliverance was bound to come to naught. The best concerted schemes had invariably failed through some frightful and inexplicable blunder on the part of the people or their leaders. It could not be marvelled at that an alien and a foreigner should look with scorn and hostility upon a nation which was thus throwing its salvation to the winds through the senseless obstinacy of a turbulent community. He shrugged his shoulders and returned to his house in a bitter frame of mind; whilst the bright-eyed Gianibelli sank back into his former attitude with a smile of malice and triumph on his face, saying softly to himself as he did so,—

"Yes, the work of the wizard has been done. Giani-

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belli's name will live. What matter then if Antwerp fall? Has she not well deserved the ruin she is bringing upon herself?"

And Gianibelli's name has lived, and moreover his work lived too in a way he little thought of at the time. And years later, when a vast armament from Spain was bearing majestically down upon the shores of another country, to try to effect there the ruin she had partially effected in the Netherlands, a few almost harmless burning boats sent adrift amongst that great squadron caused a strange panic there.

"The Antwerp fire-ships!" was yelled by hundreds of frantic voices, and Gianibelli's genius received there a tribute which would have been a source of sardonic satisfaction to him had he but known it. The Antwerp fire-ships were remembered long by the Spaniards who had seen the awful destruction wrought by them, or had heard the story from their comrades. The name of the maker might be unknown or forgotten, but the diabolical ruin effected by them lived long in the heart of man.

Failing in his first hope of getting a new and larger "hell-burner" built with lightning speed, and sent down under similar conditions to make another breach in the partially-restored bridge, the Burgomaster was still resolved not to let grass grow under his feet, and all the city had awakened as perhaps it had never done before.

Anger, disappointment, irritation and fury, all helped in that awakening. To have been within an ace of complete victory, and to have had that victory snatched from their

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grasp through the blundering incompetence of the very man against whose want of courage and energy they had been warned from the first, was an aggravation the city knew not how to put up with. The unhappy Admiral had to be smuggled out of the place and sent to Fort Lillo, lest he should be torn in pieces by the very men who had declared him to be capable of the task in which he had so entirely failed.

And Antwerp thus aroused was not going to sink back into apathy. From that day forward a more systematic and persistent hostility towards the Spaniards was commenced. Whilst in secret there was consultation about a great stroke to be attempted after due preparation, Parma was now continually harassed and harried by ceaseless feints and minor enterprises which left him no peace by day or night. Sometimes it was mock fire-ships that came floating down the river, striking terror into the hearts of all who beheld their approach; sometimes some active skirmishing, which relieved the people from a sense of their inactivity without effecting any important result. But whilst all this was going on, there was a constant interchange of messages between the city and their allies without, and at last it began to be known by every one within the walls that after all this long year of delay a resolute attempt was to be made to pierce the Kowenstyn Dike, and bring the waters of the great ocean right up to the walls of Antwerp!

Everything had come to pass exactly as the Prince of Orange had foretold might be the case were this precau-

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tion not taken; and the dike, bristling with Spanish forts and block-houses, stood as a grim barrier against the waters of the inundation which had become more or less general in the land. If once that barrier could be pierced—if once the waters of river and sea could come rolling over the submerged plains, so that the grain-laden vessels could be brought in triumph to the city—then indeed Parma's bridge would be useless as a child's toy, and the memorable siege would be at an end. It was a thing certainly worth trying. It was guessed that the losses sustained by the Spaniards through the explosion of the *Hope* must have considerably crippled Parma's resources. He was known to be summoning reinforcements from places which could ill spare them, and all this pointed to the fact that he too was in difficulties. Had the patriots known how great those difficulties were, their hopes would have run higher than they did; but even as it was, it was ardently hoped that a concerted attack upon the dike from both sides might prove successful. The country around Antwerp was now sufficiently submerged, owing to the constant piercing of the smaller dikes by one party or the other for strategic purposes, for vessels of moderate dimensions to sail from the city as far as the Kowenstyn Dike; though beyond that they could not pass, owing to the great fortified barrier hemming them in. But if, without any more of those dreaded blunders, the fleet from the city on one side, and the Zeeland fleet on the other, together with as many soldiers as could be spared from the forts of Lillo and Liefkenshoek, under Count Hohenlo, could combine

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some night suddenly and secretly, there was great hope that a landing might be effected. And if from that moment the sappers and miners began to demolish the foundations of the dike, and let the volume of water on the farther side roll over the already submerged plains, why, then, not all the power that Parma could bring against them would suffice to roll those waters back again.

And there seemed a really good hope that this plan might succeed. The long watch needful against this double set of foes was known to be trying the Spaniards greatly. Moreover, some companies of men who had hitherto been with Mondragon on the dike had been, since the attack on the bridge, drafted thither to take the place of their companions at the point where the danger seemed like to be the most pressing. This, of course, left the ridge of the long Kowenstyn less carefully and completely guarded, and it seemed possible that a sudden landing somewhere between some of those frowning forts might be successfully made before the Spaniards well knew what the enemy purposed.

The city was aroused and alert, keenly interested in this new venture, and resolved this time that there should be no blundering. The people were on their mettle, and their leaders also. Even Koppen Loppen was forgiven in the hope that this next time he would retrieve his tarnished honour. He was back again in the city, full of zeal in the new undertaking; and this time, although he was to have a command in the attacking fleet, he was not to take the responsibility alone. Sainte Aldegonde him-

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self was to command the expedition; and although some felt that a man whose presence was so sorely needed in the city should not expose himself too much to peril, yet the prevailing feeling was that his place was with his soldiers in this last and most critical attack: for he was a man of recognized military genius, and soldiers would follow him and do his bidding by instinct, when they would turn and flee if a man like the Admiral were leading them.

Every soldier in the city that could be spared was to accompany the little fleet. Lionel Wilford mustered his troop of well-trained militiamen, and begged to be allowed to accompany the expedition. Malcolm and Maurice were in that muster. Otto joined them for the nonce, he having now recovered from his slight wound, though he had not yet begun his old trade of messenger again. Joris would be in one of the boats from Lillo with Count Hohenlo; and that dashing soldier was in a fever to retrieve by successful gallantry in this new attack the reputation he had lost at Bois-le-Duc.

The temper of the people was more hopeful. They had profited by their misfortunes, and were less quarrelsome amongst themselves, more ready to listen to the advice of men qualified to advise them, and altogether more amenable to reason than they had been at any previous time during the siege. Threatened famine was teaching them the importance of acting warily, and not throwing away chances through obstinacy or folly. Slow as they had been to learn this lesson, it seemed to have been driven in upon them at last. Lionel would come home from

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discussions in Council with a brighter aspect and more hopeful air, and announce that for once all had been in accord; that the men who did not understand the work left the decision of important points to those who did; that the voice of their competent and talented Burgomaster was at last listened to with becoming respect; and that what he advised was almost unanimously agreed to, with scarce any discussion, and with no wrangling and bickering.

"If the disasters we have hitherto had have taught us wisdom at last, perchance they have been blessings in disguise," he said. "The men who at the beginning thought they could do no wrong, and that every word they spoke was a word of wisdom, are now so fearful of their own past blunders that they scarce dare to open their lips. There is but one feeling in all hearts—'Heaven send that we blunder no more!' There is hope when men thus take to heart the lessons of the past. All now look to our Burgomaster for counsel and advice. Each ignorant burgher is not eager to give his opinion, and hold that he and he alone knows best."

All in that house in Hooch Straet were in joyous spirits save young Maurice. The prospect of speedy release from long captivity, the projected voyage to England, and the hope of a speedy settlement in a country not overwhelmed and ravaged by war, acted like a tonic on all the young members of that household, and cheered them through any little privations to which they might be subjected. War had become at last hateful and terrible. Although they had grown up in its atmosphere, and had for long taken

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its vicissitudes almost as a matter of course, they had grown at length to hate it, and to loathe it with an unspeakable horror. The long siege had worn out their patience. A sense of disgust with both parties had of necessity followed upon the blunders and the petty jealousies shown by so many of the patriots since the controlling hand of the Prince of Orange had been withdrawn. A great depression had fallen upon many of those who long strove to think the very best both of their countrymen and of the cause they had in hand. The Wilfords and Van der Hammers had felt this depression strongly, and it had been an important factor in the decision they finally made as to their own future. But that decision once taken, hope and happiness returned in no small measure. All had now something to look forward to—all had a new hope and a new purpose in life; and when with all this there came a reasonable hope of speedy release from these iron walls, it could not but be that the rebound was great. Since the time when the first personal blow fell upon them, the household in Hooch Straet had not been so happy and hopeful as now.

Maurice was the only exception. He seemed unable to shake off his depression.

"I know not how it is, but it seems as though some black cloud were hovering over us, and coming very near," he said to Maud one day when she rallied him upon his grave face and listless manners. "I only trust this long-hoped-for release is not about to prove abortive. Everything seems to point to a hopeful issue, and yet

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I cannot get this load off my heart. I would indeed I could!"

Maud tried to rally him, and to shake off the qualm which came over her at hearing these words; for, as has been said before, young Maurice had always appeared to be gifted in some sort with that faculty which is akin to second sight, and he was seldom wrong in his premonitions.

"Hast been dreaming again?" she asked, striving to speak lightly.

"Nay; I have not dreamed as you mean for many a long day. I go to bed weary from drill, and sleep without vision or disturbance of any kind. It is but a feeling—a weight on my spirit. Perchance it is all fantasy; it may pass."

Maud trusted that it might, and would not let herself be cast down. Indeed, just now she was both too busy and too happy to have room to cherish gloomy thoughts or fears. All the city was alive with hope. Faces that had been dark and lowering before were bright and smiling now. Men spoke of nothing but the coming attack and the messages constantly passing between them and their allies. Plans were to be so carefully laid that there was to be no chance of blundering; and with every heart so full of hope and courage, it would be strange indeed if something were not accomplished.

For one fearful day it seemed as though even now the fate which had so long pursued them was to wreck the hopes of the burghers yet. At the moment it happened Antwerp

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was sleeping peacefully, and knew nothing of the mishap; but a small tragedy was being even then enacted on the dike.

Sainte Aldegonde had taken up his abode for the present in Fort Tholouse, with the Antwerp fleet anchored around; and a beacon-fire had been built upon the roof of the fort. Watchers in the tower of the Cathedral in Antwerp had been stationed to keep a look-out by night and by day; and so soon as this beacon-fire was lighted they were to send up three rockets, to warn the fleet at Lillo that the expedition from Antwerp had started.

Unluckily the watchers mistook a camp-fire in the neighbourhood for the beacon, and sent up their rockets at a time when the Burgomaster and his ships and soldiers had no intention whatever of commencing the attack. Of course they saw nothing of the signalling-rockets; but the watchers at Lillo did, and the little squadron started forthwith, and catching the sentries asleep, effected a landing between Fort St. George and Fort Palisade, and immediately commenced the work of striving to pierce the dike. Of course they expected each moment that their allies would arrive from the other side, and equally of course they were disappointed; whilst the Spaniards, seeing how few their assailants were, rallied themselves in a short space of time, and drove them off the dike with considerable loss.

Such a commencement to the long-talked-of attack might well cause dismay and consternation in the city. The Zeelanders might well feel that it was useless to

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attempt to help such allies as these; and for a moment there was a feeling that all was again lost. But the Burgomaster would not permit discouragement to fall upon his men. Rapid communication between him and Count Hohenlo, who had led this first gallant attack, quickly explained matters. The blunder was understood, the suspicion of treachery laid to rest; and although, owing to the renewed watchfulness of the Spaniards after this preliminary attack, they had to wait awhile before making another, the scheme was never abandoned; and the interval of waiting was employed by the Zeelanders in the construction of certain fire-ships by which they hoped to set on fire the palisade-work which guarded the dike, and perhaps the forts themselves.

It was a happy thought, and helped the expedition even more than could have been expected. The Spaniards had learned a great and not unnatural horror of these mysterious vessels, which had not long since blown a thousand of their comrades into the air in a moment of time. When in the faint light of a May morning, just as the dawn was beginning to break in the east, they saw these luminous monsters approaching from the direction of Lillo, they fled into their forts with greater discretion than courage, fearing lest a rain of cannon-balls, harpoons, and ploughshares should follow, and crush them to death as they stood.

The fire-ships themselves did little damage; but the prompt flight of the Spaniards enabled the Zeelanders to effect a landing on the dike in the very sight of their enemies. They selected the same spot as before, where

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a mile-long space ran between fort and fort. But the Spaniards, as though ashamed of their momentary panic, came swarming out of their shelters, and in a moment the dike was the scene of a desperate hand-to-hand encounter, each party striving to fling the other into the oozy waters of the river, slipping, shouting, wrestling together in all the fury of sudden onslaught.

Then the guns of the forts opened upon the Zeelanders, and for a moment they gave back in dismay. Their enemies with shouts of triumph began hurling them back over the steep sides of the dike, and some in a panic sprang into their boats for safety. But just at the moment when it seemed as though the fate of the day was already against them, a lusty cheer from the other side of the dike brought the glad news that their friends and allies from the city had arrived. Sword in hand sprang Sainte Aldegonde upon the dike, closely followed by a compact band which numbered Lionel's little picked troop amongst them; and these bold soldiers, enthusiastically joyful at being brought at last face to face with the beleaguering foe, flung themselves upon the Spaniards with a force and a fury that nothing seemed able to resist, and along the dike they drove the dismayed soldiers back into the forts which gave them temporary shelter; and then and there, having cleared a large space upon the dike, and having for the moment rid themselves of their foes, they set to work without the delay of a moment upon the great work upon which they were bent.

"Intrench yourselves! intrench yourselves!" was the

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order shouted by the Burgomaster, and like lightning the men flew to obey. There was no blundering now, and the preparations had all been so carefully made beforehand that the requisites for the work were ready to hand at a moment's notice.

The bold Zeelanders had not brought alone provisions for the city in their fleet. Here were great barges laden with hurdles, with sand-bags, with wool-sacks, with stakes, planks—everything that could be wanted for the rapid throwing up of the needful barriers to protect the sappers and miners in their work of demolishing the great dike. Nor did these bold fellows wait till they were thus protected. Leaving their comrades to throw up the intrenchment around them, they sprang to their task. Armed with spade, pick, mattock, and shovel, they leaped through the shallow water even before the word of command had been given, and commenced their task like veritable furies. Tearing, digging, delving, flinging away into the turbid water huge masses of earth, they worked harder than any convict or galley-slave; whilst the red sun rose in the east and seemed to look wonderingly upon this strange scene, and these human beavers at their task.

The Spaniards meantime, though temporarily checked and dismayed, were not long in recovering their wonted courage, and out they swarmed again to strive to demolish these rapidly-rising barriers that were protecting a work which meant the annihilation of their toil of months. With yells of savage fury they rushed upon the invaders; but their cries were returned with equal fury, and soldiers

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and citizens alike dashed at their foes with the ferocity of mad bull-dogs, and drove them back again and yet again.

The fate of Antwerp hung upon that narrow slip of land—hung upon the work of demolition going on with such wonderful rapidity.

On and on came the Spaniards, but each time they were received with a fury which left them no alternative but to retire within their forts. Lionel and his band were stationed behind one of the barricades thus hastily but strongly erected. Hohenlo guarded the other, and showed a courage that went far to retrieve the reputation he had so sorely tarnished but a few short months before. Success gave renewed enthusiasm to the patriots. With shouts and cries and yells of triumph they hurled back their foes, and built up on either side those protecting walls that were sheltering the men who were saving Antwerp from her doom. Furious as was the onslaught, it was still more furiously repelled. And meantime the Burgomaster, together with that great patriot (destined to be so great a power in days to come in the history of the Netherlands) John Olden Barneveldt, was watching with wary eyes the work on the one side and the fighting on the other, encouraging, cheering, praising, always ready with a word of counsel, always seeing where a weak point might give the enemy a chance; and as these watched and took counsel together, the sappers and miners, half in the water and half out, throwing off their upper garments as the heat of the day increased, toiled on and on like veritable furies,

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thinking no more of fatigue than their brethren the soldiers thought of hard blows and wounds. The guns from the forts roared out, to be answered by like roars from the Zeeland fleet. Soldiers locked in deadly embrace would roll down the dike on this side or that, sometimes not even loosening their hold in the blood-stained water below. It was as fierce and desperate a fight as all that long Netherland war had seen; reckless fierceness, which had always characterized the Spanish soldier, being now met by a deadly, tenacious ferocity and dogged purpose which seemed more than its match. It was war to the death on both sides; and those who fought in this furious hand-to-hand fashion knew little enough what was going on behind these quickly-erected intrenchments, nor how their friends the sappers and miners, whom they were protecting with their own lives, were progressing with the work of demolition.

A shout, a cry, a yell of triumph! So loud and so prolonged was this sudden terrific roar that on both sides there was a momentary lull, whilst the bleeding and blood-stained combatants paused to see what had chanced, and then the patriots made the welkin ring with their terrific cries of joy.

It was done—the dike was pierced! The tide, which had long been slowly rising, now poured in one huge volume of water over the great breach that had been made. And rowed by willing hands, the men cheering lustily the while, slowly came a huge grain-laden barge, one of the many that lay close at hand, just beyond the range of the

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guns of the fort, ready to enter the city with their precious freight.

There were sobs as well as shouts of joy as the soldiers and citizens from the city saw the great vessel cautiously cross the breach in the dike and lie upon the other and the city side.

"God be praised! the Lord of Heaven be thanked!" So rose the cry that went up from a thousand throats. "Antwerp is saved! Antwerp is saved!"

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CHAPTER XXI.

THE GREAT DIKE.

"ANTWERP is saved! Antwerp is saved!"

The shout of triumph was going up from thousands of parched throats as the great barge from the Zeeland side of the dike, laden with its precious load of food for the hungry city, floated slowly through the wide breach already made by the sappers and miners, and was carried by the rising tide clear over to the Antwerp side of the great barrier.

The salt waves were rolling in one after the other—one after the other. What matter that that broken dike had been the grave of hundreds of bold patriots, that many of the delvers who had dug so furiously there found their last resting-place in its oozy foundations? The deed was done. Antwerp was saved. The sparkling waves seemed to laugh in triumphant sympathy as they cast themselves through the breach and rolled onwards to the gate of the city. At last, ah, at last there was a real victory for Antwerp; no bungling here, no fatal cowardice at critical moments! Those three thousand patriots, who had met at the dike pledged to carry it or to die upon it, had nobly

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kept their word. Hundreds lay dead; but the dike was theirs—that mile-long space, the centre which was enough for their purpose. The enemy, after desperate fighting, had retired into their forts in discomfiture. The patriots, under some of their boldest leaders, were carrying war into the enemy's quarters by assaulting Fort Palisade, which looked about to fall into their hands. Where was the great Alexander? some of the patriots scornfully asked. Four leagues away at his bridge, answered Sainte Aldegonde with a smile, engaged doubtless in repelling with his wonted energy a fictitious attack upon that structure, with which the Burgomaster had had the astuteness to strive to keep the great general occupied whilst the real fight was going on at the Kowenstyn.

Admirably planned, heroically carried out, this dash upon the great dike had been a signal triumph. Joy, exultation, and a rapture akin to madness now took hold upon those who had led this successful attack. The enemy had retired, beaten as it seemed. The sappers and miners had for some time been pursuing their toil without obstruction. Fort Palisade was all but theirs. The fleet from Holland and Zeeland was battering the fort, and ready to fling raking broadsides at any foe who should venture again to molest the industrious beavers. Victory was theirs, absolute and final. Now must Antwerp be told this good news; now must she see for herself what had been accomplished! The great barge, the earnest of what was to follow, was already lying on the inner side of the dike. With a loud cheer of triumph Count Hohenlo sprang upon

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her, waving his sword above his head and breaking out into extravagant praise of his brave soldiers, and equally wild expressions of triumph against the vanquished enemy.

"Parma is vanquished!" he cried, in tones loud enough to be heard for a long distance along the dike. "His wondrous bridge is now but a child's toy, as useless as the broken plaything of an infant. The river is rolling back to its old bed. The salt waves are already, I doubt not, lapping the walls of Antwerp. Great fleets will ride securely up to her very gates. Bread and wine and all good things will be sold within her walls to-morrow in abundance. The Spaniards may drown like rats in their holes, or flee before the power of an enemy they cannot resist. Brave men, our work is done. Victory is ours. I go to take the glad tidings to the city, to set the joy-bells ringing and the bonfires blazing. When the sun sinks and you look towards the city, you will see by the glow in the sky that we are holding high revel there. Antwerp is saved! Antwerp is relieved! No fear from Parma or his legions now! The great dike is ours! God has fought for us and with us, and has overthrown the enemy. The long siege is at an end. Victory, victory!"

Wild shouting and cheers answered the speech, every phrase of which had provoked a tumult of applause. After the long and bitter struggle of the early morning, this respite did indeed seem like victory itself; and if there were some amongst those resting sword in hand upon the slippery dike who thought that this emphatic triumph was perhaps just a little premature, seeing how much yet

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remained to be done, the bulk of the soldiers and of their commanders were carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, and everything was forgotten but the almost frantic joy of the thought that Antwerp was saved.

Sainte Aldegonde was amongst those who, in the exultant triumph of victory, thought more of taking the joyous news to the city than of remaining with his soldiers upon the dike. What was that strange fatality which possessed all ranks of citizens alike during that fateful siege, and rendered barren time after time the hard-won victories they had waded through seas of blood to gain, or had obtained by dashing acts of courage worthy of the dogged stubbornness of their race?

Why, oh why in this hour of seeming triumph did the leaders of the brave men desert them, as though the day were already absolutely won?

The Burgomaster might possibly be forgiven for hastening back to the city, where so many eager thousands were awaiting with breathless expectancy the news of the issue of the day. Great preparations would have to be made for the reception of those laden barges which would shortly be coming in to fill the magazines, and make glad the hearts of the patient citizens. But what was Hohenlo thinking of, that he should abandon his post as Commander-in-chief, deserting the soldiers, who might yet need a general's eye and voice over them, for the puerile pleasure of hearing joy-bells rung and receiving the plaudits of the excited populace?

But the dashing Hohenlo had lost his head, as had all

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too many on the dike that day. Eager, impetuous, and rash, he claimed that the victory was already theirs. Not pausing to remember the fatal error once made in like fashion before, he was all in a fever to tell Antwerp of his prowess, and to be fêted by the fair dames who would welcome him as a hero and victor. No, he would not be left behind when the good news was to be told; and it was by his command that several wounded Spaniards, who appeared from their arms and accoutrements to be men of mark and standing, should be lifted into the barge, and taken into the city as a savage trophy of this great triumph.

Joris and Otto were amongst those who were bidden to lift these wounded men upon the deck of the barge; and as they removed the helmet of one prostrate gallant, whose armour bespoke him to be a youth of some mark, Malcolm came suddenly hurrying up to exclaim,—

"By my troth, that is none other than Don Rodrigo de Castro, the brother of our Señor Alphonso!"

"Why, sure 'tis the same face!" cried both Otto and Joris at once. "It were well his brother should know of this. Let us send Maurice back in charge of him, and he will fetch Alphonso to his side. I fear me he is wounded to the death. Men with *that* look upon their face seldom rise up from their couch again. If he is to die, rather let him die in peace with his brother beside him than be trodden perhaps to death here on this dike, or washed into the salt waves and drowned before any can come to his aid."

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"A good thought!" cried Malcolm quickly. "I saw Maurice but a moment ago. I will find and send him back to the city. It were well they should have news at home of how the day goes. It will comfort them to see the lad safe and sound. Ah, here he comes! And methinks he has had enough of fighting for one day.—How now, Maurice? art hurt, boy? Thy face is as white as a kerchief. Bleeding too! Let me bind up that scratch, and then thou shalt go back to the city to take news of this victory to those at home."

Maurice had no desire to leave the dike; but the "scratch" proved to be so deep a gash in his sword-arm, and the loss of blood had been so great, that both Malcolm and his brothers insisted he should relinquish all further attempt at fighting, and return to the city to tell the news there; and the charge of the wounded Rodrigo reconciled him at last to this errand. Tenderly and gently the wounded man was laid down on the deck of the barge, Maurice having charge of him, and then a great cheer rang out from a thousand throats as the heavy-laden vessel spread her brown sails to the slight favouring breeze, and moved gently off in the direction of the city.

The cheer aroused the attention of some of the captains who had been leading the assault of Fort Palisade, and one amongst them, sword in hand, came hurrying back to ask the cause. It was Lionel, who had been in the thick of the fight the whole time, and who with his little company had done most valiant service during those early hours of assault and triumph.

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Finding his kinsmen standing thus together in a little knot, their eyes fixed upon the moving vessel, now many hundred yards away, he asked what had befallen, and on hearing opened wide his eyes in astonishment and dismay.

"Our Burgomaster and the Count both gone!" he cried; "both our leaders deserted us at the most critical moment of this whole long and perilous siege! O my God! have we not had enough of blunders? Is even this day's triumph to be snatched from our grasp?"

It was so seldom that Lionel was betrayed into taking the name of God thus upon his lips that the three youths looked at him in wonder, and saw that he was strangely moved.

"But, Lionel," argued Malcolm, "surely the day is won; surely the dike is ours? Look how the salt waves are rolling through the three great breaches! See that barge which has floated over! In a few hours more, when we have silenced the forts, a hundred such will be sailing towards the city."

"When we have silenced the forts! when we have taken the dike! Boy, do you think our work is yet done? I tell you it is scarce begun. Do you think the Spaniards, though silent and subdued for the moment, are conquered yet? Do you think we shall hear no more of them? Think ye that when the news of this fight reaches Alexander's ears he will rest in his camp and come not to the aid of his veterans here? Where is Mondragon? where is Mansfield—Capizucca—Cardona—Toralva? Are they all sleeping, think you? Will they let us quietly make

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good our work without a vehement attack? And where will our leaders be when that attack comes? May Heaven forgive them this folly, for it will be hard for man to do so!"

"But," cried Malcolm in quick dismay, "why speakest thou so, Lionel? The dike is pierced—the work is done."

"The work is not done," answered Lionel, tersely and almost sternly. "It will be hours and hours before it can be done in anything like a fashion that will be of permanent utility to Antwerp. True, the barrier has been bitten through, and that in three places; but think you that these bites are deep enough or wide enough to bring the ocean rolling to the gates of the city? Nay, they are just sufficient at high tide for yon barge to float through; but when that tide ebbs again, you will soon see that the breaches are utterly inadequate for the passage of the relieving fleet, and it will need hours and hours of the hardest toil ere the dike can be pierced past hope of easy repair, were Parma once here to see to it. With the waters rolling round them, the delvers can do but little now; and think you that in these hours when we are forced to be idle our foes will be idle too? Nay, I trow we shall soon have evidence enough that they are but mustering for an attack more furious than the one we have repulsed. And where are our leaders, if the enemy comes bearing down upon us? Ringing joy-bells and feasting themselves in the city! Heaven send their feast be not turned to gall and bitterness whilst the meat is yet in their mouths!"

Greatly dismayed by thoughts which certainly had not

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occurred of themselves to the inexperienced young soldiers, they lost no time in organizing a determined party of workers under Lionel himself for the further strengthening and supporting their barricades—those quickly-erected intrenchments which had been thrown up to guard from the attacks of the enemy the sappers and miners at their toil.

The mile-long space between the two forts was practically theirs, and if once this main and central portion of the dike could be demolished, victory would indeed be secure. The diggers were still at work with a tenacity of purpose and an industry that spoke well for their goodwill; but, as Lionel had said, whilst the tide was high they could not get at the lower portions of the dike—those solid foundations which it was all-important to undermine and destroy. Much as had already been done, there was much more still to accomplish. The breaches which had already been dug could be repaired almost as quickly as they had been made. It was only when the very foundations of the great dike should be demolished, and the salt sea come rolling in through clefts too wide and deep to bridge, that Antwerp could truly be said to be saved. The triumph which had been already achieved might be almost as quickly snatched away, unless it were followed up by a great deal more; and was this a time for the two chief commanders to leave their soldiers, with no one to take absolute command, each captain being responsible for his own company, but having no superior authority to look to for orders in the moment of peril?

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And what were the Spaniards doing all this while? Were they as hopelessly beaten as the patriot leaders had fondly imagined when they flew back to the city with the news of the magnificent victory? And what was the great Alexander doing away in his camp by the bridge? Was he altogether engrossed in repelling the feigned attack there, or had he got wind that something was happening farther away which required his personal supervision?

Decidedly the Spaniards were not sleeping, though for a moment they had been paralyzed by the suddenness of the attack, and had given back before the furious assault made upon them from both sides of the dike by the patriot soldiers and their guns. But they had withdrawn only to take counsel with their veteran commander, Count Mansfield, who was stationed at Stabroek—a fort at the Palisade end of the dike—and who had taken the precaution earlier in the day, before the dike had been broken through and closed to them, to send a message to the camp by the bridge of what seemed likely to occur.

And now amongst the officers gathered together in counsel the question was put, Should they wait for Parma's arrival, or for nightfall, when a surprise might be made upon the wearied foe? or should they attack them now in broad daylight, with everything against them? For by this time the patriots were thoroughly intrenched upon the narrow isthmus, three thousand strong, and every man under a vow to sell his life rather than budge an inch—a dogged, stubborn, and determined foe such as the Spaniards had not had to face of late, albeit there had

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been many such deadly moments of furious resistance endured by them in the earlier stages of the war.

But the thought of waiting was intolerable to many of the boldest spirits there, and the captain of the Italian Legion, Camillo Capizucca by name, stood forth boldly, and said,—

"And why should we wait for nightfall or for the Prince? Would to Heaven he were with us! But since he is not, and cannot be just at this juncture, are we to stand by idle whilst yon rebel horde makes secure its position, batters down or takes possession of our forts, and cuts deeper and deeper through the dike, thus throwing to the winds of heaven all these months of toil and hard fighting? Shame upon us if we thus stand idle whilst ruin is wrought to the Spanish cause! Every hour that we wait gives the enemy power and strength, and puts into his hand a sword to slay us withal. Count Mansfield, and you brothers-in-arms and gentlemen, I pray you let me forthwith lead my men to the attack. I claim not that I and my band are more valorous than others, but I do claim that none be more devoted to the Prince of Parma than we. On this very instant we will sally forth to victory or death, as he in like case would do; and let all who feel with us follow with us, and drive yon heretic rabble from the position they have taken up!"

This spirited speech was received with great applause, and instant preparations were now made for the attack. Indeed the chief difficulty was like to be the eagerness with which each officer desired to be foremost to dash upon

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the foe. Upon that little band of land scarce ten yards wide the soldiers had to march in narrow file, and both Spaniards and Italians were now zealous to lead the shining array. For a moment it seemed as though a quarrel for precedence might mar the harmony of the day, as some Spanish reinforcements under Don Juan d'Aquila came hurrying up, eager to join in the fray they had heard from afar. But the leaders were too wise to permit this rivalry to engender bitterness, and grasping each other by the hand, declared that hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder that day's fight should be fought. First invoking the aid of the Blessed Virgin and the Holy Saints, whilst the soldiers all fell on their knees and crossed themselves, the gallant leaders started together at the head of their enthusiastic troops; and after a rapid march, cheering as they moved, they flung themselves upon the patriots attacking Fort Palisade, and after a short and sharp action, in which there was considerable loss of life on both sides, succeeded in driving them back within their own intrenchments.

"Victory, victory!" shouted the Spaniards and Italians as they saw this; and Capizucca, wiping his sword and looking round with approval upon his men, said shortly and decidedly,—

"Victory indeed! and from henceforth this fort shall be known as Fort Victory; for methinks this is but the first step towards as gallant and decisive a victory as the annals of these long wars has yet seen."

A great cheer greeted this speech, and suddenly it

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seemed as though that cheer was taken up and echoed by their allies a mile away, and beyond Fort St. George. Could they have heard and answered? It was possible, and yet it scarce seemed likely.

"What is it?" asked one and another. "Have they seen, and are they giving us answer?"

But for a moment all was in uncertainty, whilst the cheering from the opposite end of the dike seemed to swell and increase, and at last the watchman from the top of the fort cried out,—

"I see now! I see now! It is the Prince of Parma. The Prince has arrived. Victory, victory!"

The wild enthusiasm which now spread from rank to rank of the warlike legions brought to this desperate encounter boded little good for the patriot party, deserted by their own leaders at this most critical moment. The magnetic power of Alexander Farnese in the field was well known to both sides. Wherever he was—ever in the forefront of the peril—there the men toiled and fought and died with the utmost devotion and constancy. It needed but the knowledge that his eye was upon them to energize the weakest and most timid soldiers into heroes for the time being. As with the Prince of Orange, so with the Prince of Parma: their personal presence often did more for a cause than that of ten thousand soldiers. And here, as ever, just in the nick of time, came that redoubtable general in person to the spot where the need was sorest—not deluded by the feigned attack upon the bridge, though he had remained a short while there to

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direct operations and see that there was no blundering, but with all his energy and his authority just where it was most needed. No wonder that an electric thrill of triumph already ran through the Spanish ranks; no wonder that there were some amongst the patriots whose hearts sank within them as the name of Parma was shouted in every exultant accent by their foes. They were not beaten yet. With dogged resolution and desperation they resolved to hold their own, and not to leave that dike till it had been ruptured to its very foundations. But all the while there was within them a bitter feeling that they had been deserted—that they had been left in the hour of peril by those who should have been the last, not the first, to quit the spot. And the very fact that Alexander of Parma was there to lead on and cheer and encourage his own soldiers in their task made the contrast between his ceaseless activity and the blind confidence of their own general the more marked and the more disheartening.

The Prince arrived at a critical moment for Spain. The rebels had not been idle during the three hours they had had for fortifying themselves in their position on the narrow belt of land; and the sappers and miners, when hindered in their own toil by the rising waters, had employed themselves busily in throwing up earthworks and strengthening the intrenchments behind which they were again to work. Materials in plenty were to their hand; and Parma saw that formidable bulwarks had been erected against him, whilst behind these bulwarks the eager diggers and delvers were again at their task of the rapid destruction of the dike.

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If this destruction were to be hindered and Antwerp balked of her hope, there was indeed no time to be lost. The ebbing tide was uncovering more and more of the great bulwark, and deeper and deeper was it being bitten into by a hundred picks and shovels. Once let it be pierced to its very foundations, and Antwerp was safe from him for ever. None knew that better than Parma; but also he well knew that that task was one of immense labour, and could not be carried out under many more hours of intense toil. It was his business to see that that toil never was accomplished; and he felt himself equal to the task, even though the morning hours of the day had seen such disaster to the Spanish flag.

From rank to rank he passed in person, setting the attack in order, and cheering by his magnetic presence the drooping spirit of those who had begun to think the day lost.

"He who refuses this day to follow me," he said, as he briefly addressed the assembled array, "has never had regard to his own honour, nor has God's cause or the King's ever been dear to his heart."

Those words were enough: the soldiers answered by a shout and a cheer, Spaniard vying with Italian to show enthusiasm for the cause and for their general. Their watchmen informed them that from Fort Palisade, on the other side of the breach and the intrenched camp of the rebels, Spanish soldiers were steadily advancing to the attack. It was for these two bands to hew themselves a way through the rebels, and meet together in triumph, and the deed was done.

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Near to the Prince of Parma, and therefore near to the forefront of the desperate charge, marched Carlos de Cueva and Diego de Escolano. They knew that Rodrigo had been stationed latterly within one of the forts along the dike, and trusted to come upon him in the *mêlée* before long. He was sure to have been in the thickest of the fighting earlier in the day. From him they would doubtless hear the account of how the attack had been made, and how the enemy had obtained so great a triumph in thus getting a footing on the dike.

But it was no child's play, it was the grimmest earnest, this march along the dike, and the furious assault upon the enemy's intrenchments. From the boats upon both sides of the dike boomed forth the steady cannonade of the patriots; and although this was answered as steadily and as furiously from the Spaniards in the forts, the ranks of the assailants were terribly mown down by the cross-fire, and the waters were stained red with human blood.

Doubtless within the intrenchments the cannonade was doing work as deadly, and the rebels were falling by tens and scores too; but at present the assailants could not judge of that, as they marched onwards with intrepid courage, those from behind pushing on in place of the comrades who had fallen, in grim silence now, only longing to meet the foe hand to hand along that oozy dike, growing slippery with blood. The guns were doing good work for them, in slowly shattering and disabling many of the ships and boats which had gathered round the dike, and which one ofter another became silenced—some for lack of

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ammunition, some because they had become unmanageable. But for the moment, in the unceasing and terrific roar nothing could be distinguished; and in the stern, set faces of assailants and assailed there was nothing to be read but an absolute determination to conquer in the fight, or to die sword in hand upon the disputed bulwark.

It could scarcely be called a battle; it was a series of hand-to-hand duels, fought all along that mile of dike, where the patriots had intrenched themselves, and where the Spaniards, breaking at last through those intrenchments by sheer weight of numbers, flung themselves upon their foes, and drove them hither and thither, or were themselves driven backwards and hurled into the mire and water beneath.

No pen can describe the scene; for me such an attempt would be to court disastrous failure. Amongst all the deadly and grim fights with which this long, long war may fairly be said to bristle, none was more grim, more deadly, more long remembered, than this ghastly fight upon the Kowenstyn. Deeds of personal valour of the most daring kind were everywhere to be witnessed. Soldiers and burghers, sappers and miners, citizens and men of mark and renown, were alike actuated by the same spirit, and fought as if the very demon of battle were within them. The obstinate valour and tenacity shown on both sides was a marvel even to those who had witnessed many grim tussles round the walls of a city or in the open field. Perchance if the patriots had had their leaders to cheer and direct them, perchance had the tide not deserted them by

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its quick ebb at this critical moment, the fate of the day might even now have been different. But, alas for the cause of liberty! the well-directed fire upon the Zeeland squadron, and the quick fall of the tide, combined to make further assistance from the ships impossible. They were half of them disabled, others were seriously crippled, and unless they remained to fall a prey into Parma's hands, they must of necessity sheer off into deeper water as the tide fell.

The commander had no alternative but to sound a retreat and recall his men; and as the Antwerp soldiers saw themselves deserted by their allies, who could scarcely be blamed at the last for hurrying back to their ships, a sudden despair took the place of the wild enthusiasm which had filled them hitherto, and a panic succeeded, which the brave officers strove in vain to allay. The English, Scotch, and Flemish captains all did their utmost; but there was no commander to look to, no head to direct proceedings, now that the fortune of the day had turned. The Spaniards were in that state of mad fury which always fell upon them when victory was assured, and yelling out that the sea had deserted the rebels, and that all was lost, they flew like bull-dogs upon the terrified remnant. Then began a scene of carnage that those who survived it shuddered to remember to the end of their days.

Of those who fell upon the dike, or were drowned in the waters of the Scheldt, or smothered in the slimy ooze, no record was ever accurately given, but they must have been counted by the thousand. Koppen Loppen was amongst

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the victims, and perhaps to die a soldier's death was the happiest thing that could now have befallen him.

Of those with whom this story is concerned it fared but sadly. Otto and Joris had fallen side by side before the intrenchments, led by Lionel again and again against the furious assailants, beaten back inch by inch, but refusing to give ground, till almost all the gallant little band had fallen, and the two swift messengers lay still and silent in their last sleep, to be pushed hastily aside with heaps of slain into the miry waters, lest the mass of corpses might impede too much the onward rush of the Spanish and Italian legions.

As for Lionel himself, though sorely wounded, his life was yet whole in him when this terrible rout began; and what one man could accomplish he did to stem the torrent, and together with Morgan and James, and many other gallant officers, worked might and main to encourage their despairing followers and rally them even when all hope of victory was at an end. Beside him, rather as though he bore a charmed life, strode Malcolm, active, alert, and full of zeal and courage. His quick eye and ready arm had many times saved his brother's life. But things had now grown so desperate that it was hopeless to strive to turn the tide of battle. For the few living and wounded soldiers to return to Antwerp with the ill news was all that could now be accomplished; and with a stern, set face Lionel stood by, assisting the maimed, bleeding, and exhausted men into the boats that had the boldness to approach near enough to receive them, Malcolm giving

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him all assistance, and often cutting down a Spanish soldier who, with needless brutality, would strive to inflict a death-wound upon a poor wretch being thus lifted in.

But all the Spaniards were not thus cruel. As a quick rush was being made by some half-dozen yelling fiends to strive to stop this work of mercy, a young officer, in handsome armour and of very lofty height and presence, suddenly stepped down amongst them, and with his own sword beat back the foremost ruffian, who sought to hinder the transit of the wounded into the barge.

"Back, knave," he called out, in tones of cool authority, "or I run you through the body with mine own rapier! Surely you have had blood enough for one day! Let these men be. Let them carry their wounded away to the city. The dike is ours. That is enough. Begone, I say! We have spilt blood enough in the fight; we will not disgrace our victory by needless carnage."

The men growled, but shrank back instantly; and the young officer, sword in hand, stood quietly by, watching the rapid embarkation of escaped and wounded soldiers, lending a helping hand himself sometimes, and interposing many times when some Spaniard or Italian would have offered resistance.

At last Lionel, having done all he could, turned to this stranger and said,—

"Señor, I know not who you are, but I thank you. Do me one more favour: engage with me in single combat, and give me my quietus. I had thought to go back in hope and triumph to this unhappy city; if I return

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now, it is in disgrace and misery. Better to leave my body here with those who have won the soldier's death denied to me; better—"

But the sentence was never finished. The long strain and the loss of blood, which had gone far to turn Lionel's steady head and clear brain, had been too much. Even as he spoke he sank swooning to the ground, and the stranger, with a smile upon his face—he had removed his helmet as he stood watching this embarkation—stooped and raised him in his strong arms.

"Lay him with the others; he will yet live to do good service to your people, I doubt not," he said to Malcolm, who was standing waist-deep in the water, helping in the fugitives and the wounded. "Is he kin of yours?"

"My brother," answered Malcolm briefly, for his heart swelled so that he could scarcely frame the words.

"A right noble brother to have," replied the tall Spaniard. "Take care of him, and see him safe to the city; for methinks he will need care and good tendance, though he be not hurt to the death, I take it. Now, good youth, in with thee thyself! I may not much longer be able to keep back these bloodhounds. Thou hast heard what our Spanish soldiers are like when they have tasted blood."

Malcolm hesitated.

"I had not thought of returning myself," he said, with a strange gleam in his blue eyes; "I would sooner remain here—to fight yet again."

A smile broke over that handsome, noble face. He put out his hand and laid it on Malcolm's shoulder.

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"I like thee for that feeling, boy; it is the true soldier spirit. But wert thou ten years older, and hadst thou seen as much of warfare as I have, thou wouldst know that it is a better and indeed a braver thing at times to retreat, when retreat is inevitable, than to fling thyself upon the swords of the foe, when there is naught to be gained by the casting away of thy life. Go back with these to the city; and the day may come when thou wilt meet us yet in the field. Thou must learn to take defeat as well as victory. If every army was cut to pieces *in toto* at every lost battle, where would the cause be? Back to the city, boy! Thy death will profit Antwerp nothing; thy life may be of value to others besides thyself. Think of them and not of thine own humiliation."

Malcolm did so, and after a moment or two of reluctant hesitation sprang into the boat.

"May I ask your name, Señor?" he said; "methinks I have seen your face before. Yes, surely—"

"I am Don Carlos de Cueva."

"The friend and comrade of Alphonso!" cried Malcolm, with sudden animation. "He will be glad to hear news of you."

"You are then one of those who have sheltered him! I am glad I have been thus able to succour you and your comrades. In days to come perchance we may meet again."

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CHAPTER XXII.

AN INTERRUPTED BANQUET.

"SAVED! saved! saved!"—"Victory! victory!"—"Hurrah for the noble Burgomaster!"—"Hurrah for the brave Count Hohenlo!"—"Oh, thank Heaven for this welcome relief!"—"God be praised for all His mercies!"—"Victory! victory!"—"Death to the Spaniards!"—"Confusion to all who withstand the true faith!"—"Antwerp is saved! Antwerp is saved!"

The town was ringing with these frantic cries. The citizens, almost mad with joy, were rushing out of their houses and about the streets, falling on each other's necks, wringing each other by the hand, exclaiming, gesticulating, shouting, and weeping. The bells from all the steeples began to thrill out their wild, glad message, pealing and ringing through the clear air as though the very spirit of joy were in them. Wild as were the clash and the clamour, it was none too wild for the frantic excitement of the people. The thing was done — the dike was pierced! Antwerp was saved! Women who had bravely stood the long strain of wearing anxiety now suddenly broke down and wept aloud as the joy-bells clanged and crashed above

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their heads, drowning the tumult of voices in the streets, and laying to rest all doubts but that the cause of the tumult had been rightly divined. Young girls clung together laughing and weeping wildly, not knowing how otherwise to express their joy and give vent to those feelings of intense thankfulness which this glad release from anxiety and fear brought with it. Strong men meeting in the streets grasped hands, and felt that choking in the throat which hinders ready speech; and fathers and mothers, with their children about them, fell upon their knees and gave thanks aloud to God for His great mercy in sending help at last when it had almost seemed as though no help could come.

The awful chain that had bound them in so many long months, and seemed at the last to be eating into their very hearts, was snapped in twain. The decisive blow for which they had long been preparing was struck at last, and—oh, God be thanked!—struck with deadly and effectual purpose.

From early dawn the wharfs and quays of the city had been lined and crowded with eager watchers, pale-faced crowds of men and women, who heard through the still, cold air of the early morning the boom of the battle, and knew that upon that narrow rampart of earth the whole fate of the city hung. How was the day going? What meant those sounds of strife? What guns were those booming out with ceaseless roar? Had the Zeeland fleet been faithful? Had there been promptitude without blundering? What, ah, what was going on only a few

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leagues away? Wild hopes alternated with sickening fears; and sometimes a weary and perhaps only half-fed woman waiting in that crowd would sink to the earth, overcome by the flood-tide of emotion, and strong arms would lift and bear her away, whilst the patient throng stood still waiting—waiting—watching!

The tide rose higher and higher, and suddenly a voice rang through the stillness of expectation, which had become almost awful.

"See! see! see! it has passed high-water mark. Look! it is above high-water line. Men of Antwerp, that can but betoken one thing: the dike is broken—the dike is pierced!"

A shout, a cheer, breathless, tremulous at first, but increasing in volume and intensity as the news spread like wildfire through that dense, packed crowd. The sun had broken through the morning mists, and suddenly poured a golden radiance over the city. It was like an omen of success. The shout was taken up and echoed by tens of thousands of voices.

"The dike is broken! the dike is broken! Oh, God in Heaven be praised for this mercy!"

But yet the crowd moved not from its station, save that a few scouts rushed through the streets yelling out the news to the citizens who yet remained within, and who came flocking to their windows. If indeed the news were true, if indeed this higher tide betokened the success of the dike-breakers, surely tidings would quickly be despatched by boat to the city. Of all that breathless, wait-

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ing crowd there was not one willing to leave before the suspicion and glad hope had been made a certainty.

Nor had they long to wait. Again had the deep, palpitating silence of intense excitement fallen upon the vast multitude—that silence which seems only to be broken by the heart-throb of a huge assembly all gathered together in one place for one purpose, thrilled by one hope, pulsating with one ardent longing, the heart of the many beating as the heart of one, death-like stillness having hushed all words, because the intense expectation of the moment is too deep for speech.

"A sail! a sail! a sail!"

The cry was from above. It began like a distant murmur of summer breezes, and was taken up and passed on, till the murmur became a hum and the hum a roar. The crowd surged and swayed like a sea stirred by a sudden blast of wind. Articulate words were lost in shouts and cries and sobs; for as if by magic a wild whisper had gone through the people that this was no Antwerp boat returned, but a craft from Zeeland—one of those great barges so well known and so warmly welcomed by the citizens a while ago. "A Zeeland boat! a Zeeland boat!" The cry went up like a thunder-peal from ten thousand throats. That could but mean one thing; that was evidence none could gainsay: the dike was pierced! the dike was pierced! The city was saved!

Oh the mad excitement and ecstasy of those long minutes, whilst the barge with stately dignity was slowly rowed past those quays upon which half the townsfolk had

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assembled! Oh the yells, the cheers, the shouts, as the dashing and handsome Count Hohenlo, his golden curls floating round his head, his armour stained and flecked with blood, but bright and gay despite the tokens of strife, stood in the vessel's prow and waved his acknowledgment of this thunder of applause, calling out to the eager and enthusiastic multitude that the thing was done; that the dike was broken; that the great waves from the ocean were rolling over the breach thus made; and that soon the Zeeland fleet, laden with boundless supplies, would be following them to receive the welcome of which this was but the foretaste!

Oh the shouts and wild cries of joy and triumph! Was it wonderful that the city went well-nigh mad? A thousand arms were stretched out as though to embrace this deliverer; a thousand voices called down Heaven's blessing upon him as he stood smiling there in all the bravery of youth and beauty and success. There was the Burgomaster too, his powerful face, pale and worn with the long strain, lighted up now with joyous smiles. There were cheers for him, and for all the gallant band who had gone forth pledged to victory or death, and who in these few short hours had achieved a signal and glorious victory.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten day and hour. The whole city was in a ferment of unspeakable delight. Perhaps in all that town, at that moment of tumultuous joy, there was only one man who stood aloof with mocking smile and sinister words, and that man was Gianibelli.

He had not been able to resist the infection of excite-

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ment when the distant booming of the guns was heard. He had joined old Van der Hammer in the street, as the latter passed his dwelling; and Veronica, seeing that Maud and Alphonso were with him, slipped on her hood and came out too. She, like all those in Hooch Straet, had not slept that night—had scarcely attempted to rest. Was not her heart as closely bound up in that coming contest as theirs could be? Had not Malcolm gone forth to the fight with every soldier that Antwerp could spare? Ever since it became known in the city that the signals had been sent up warning the Zeelanders of the coming attack, not an eye had closed in sleep. Pale with watching and anxiety, but full of hope and confidence, the girls could not consent to be left behind. Maud and Coosje were too restless not to follow when the Vader took his hat and declared he must go down to the quay. He looked rather taken aback to find that the maidens were bent on coming too, but knew not how at such a moment to say them nay; and Alphonso, asking leave to accompany and protect them, the whole party sallied forth together.

They did not mix with the vast and increasing crowd, but by a little dexterous management succeeded in slipping through the throng and entering one of the warehouses, close alongside the quay, belonging to the merchant, of which he had the key.

The warehouses had long been empty—there was no trade with a beleaguered city; but the bare walls gave them shelter and protection from the throng, and from an unglazed upper window they could see over the people's

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heads, and had been in an excellent position for watching the arrival of the barge as it made its triumphal entrance into the city.

But they were penned within this place for a while. It would not have been prudent to sally forth just at once into the midst of the wildly-surging crowd that seemed to have gone mad in its joy. Whilst the sobs and shouts of the people below testified to their intense joy and triumph, whilst Maud and Coosje kissed each other with tears, and Van der Hammer, uncovering his head, reverently gave thanks to God for this deliverance, the Italian stood apart with a sardonic smile upon his face, and remarked in his scoffing and sneering fashion,—

"The dike is pierced, is it, my brave young captain? The Zeeland fleet, with its bountiful supplies, will soon be here in Antwerp, will it? I would have counselled you, my gay young blunderer, to have waited till that hope had become a certainty, and have escorted it in triumph home yourself. What is one barge-load of grain to a starving city? Where is the evidence of this marvellous triumph that is sending all yon crowd of fools raving mad? Wait and see, my friends, before you offer up your pious thanksgivings. Wait and see!"

"O father," cried Veronica, softly and pleadingly, "spoil not our joy in this so happy moment."

"What mean you, sir?" asked Van der Hammer, with more quickness of speech than he was wont to show. "Sure our own eyes have received testimony that the dike is broken, else could not yon barge have entered these

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waters. What more have we to fear from our foes? The dike once broken—"

"May be quickly repaired if your position upon it be not made wondrous strong. Will Alexander Farnese stand by idle whilst the work of months is being swept away? In his absence from the scene of action a victory has been won; but when the great Alexander reaches the spot, as he must do on hearing the ill tidings, will he rest content to leave his enemies in possession? Is a great dike dug to its foundations in an hour—in three—in six hours? Fools! fools! fools! Let them take heed that their joy be not turned into mourning!"

"O father, say not so!" cried Veronica, who had come to have a great dread of her father's evil prognostications, since they had so often proved themselves to be true. "Surely our brave soldiers have accomplished the hardest part of their task. They have won a footing on the dike; they have made a breach. Surely what they have won they can maintain, be the Prince of Parma never so brave and skilful."

"Ay, if their leaders were with them to guide and direct," answered Gianibelli, with a fierce sneer; for his bitterness against the folly of the Dutch had never been laid aside. "But their leaders have thought good to desert them at the first flush of triumph. Or have they left our bold and worthy friend Koppen Loppen in sole charge of the army, he having proved so marvellously well fitted for a position requiring courage and generalship? It would be like them; it would be all in a piece with what has

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gone before. O ye fools of Antwerp, great men and small! Methinks ye will never learn wisdom till your city has been humbled to the very dust."

This prognostication of Gianibelli's, coupled with his perfectly just criticism of the conduct of the two men who had joint-command of the expedition—Hohenlo being the commander from Lillo, and Sainte Aldegonde from Antwerp —somewhat dashed the joy and hopefulness of the party in this bare room; and not even the tumultuous sounds of joy without could entirely restore to them the first sense of triumph and delight. Gianibelli, tracing patterns with his stick upon the dust on the floor, was demonstrating to Van der Hammer that even deep breaches in the dike might quickly be filled up again at the ebb tide, if the sappers and miners had not penetrated to the foundations, and this would be a work of considerable time and great labour. If the dike could be held for four-and-twenty hours, then this might be accomplished; but these bites in the top of it, though enough to enable a barge at high water to float over, were by no means of necessity the salvation of Antwerp. Gianibelli was too skilful an engineer for his words not to carry all too much weight; and now indeed did it seem a terrible blunder for the two commanders to have left their post in face of the peril to be apprehended so soon as Parma should appear on the scene of action with his eagle eye and inspiring presence. Van der Hammer groaned aloud as he thought what might even now be happening, and the joy-bells smote upon the ears of that little party with something of mockery in their clash of gladness.

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They were roused by a hammering at the outer door, and going to open it, found Maurice, flushed and breathless, standing without. His quick eyes had caught sight of the party at the window as the barge passed by, and he had fled to find them so soon as the boat touched the quay.

"Victory! victory!" he shouted, as he embraced his sister and bent his knee for his father's blessing. "Oh, I would you had all been there to see that gallant fight, and the great salt waves dashing through the breach when our bold fellows had dug it! But I must not tell my story now; that will keep till another time. I come with news for our Señor. Ha! he is there. I saw him not at first.—Señor, I fear me I bring you ill tidings; but I was intrusted with the care of your brother, who was placed upon the barge wounded, and nigh to death, as I fear me. Our men thought that the sight of some of their slain or wounded enemies would be pleasing to them of this town; and although the thought was something savage, perchance, it seemed well to lift Don Rodrigo out of the crush and trampling tumult of the dike and place him in safety on the barge, where at least he could lie at ease, and be tended in some sort by any who had a thought to give him. They sent me hither with him, since I could not well fight much more; and I have done for him what I could, but I fear me—" and Maurice paused, looking hesitatingly at Alphonso, as if afraid to say more.

He understood, and bent his head in acknowledgment of the kindness shown them both, as he said,—

"Canst take me to him, good lad?"

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"Yea verily, if I may," he answered, looking at his father; for Alphonso was not quite like a free citizen, and could not go and come altogether as he would. Van der Hammer understood the unspoken question, and replied,—

"The people be too mad with joy to heed us. Come, let us go together and visit this sick captive. Perchance we might move him to Hooch Straet. It were better for him to lie there than here."

Van der Hammer was a man who was able generally to carry out what he desired, and on these quays he had always been a power. The crowd was dispersing now to set the bonfires blazing, and to attend the two triumphant commanders through the roaring streets to the Burgomaster's house. Others were unloading the barge of grain, and making great preparations for the reception of the vast stores that were to be soon brought into their magazines. The wounded prisoners had been left to the tender mercies of anybody who would give an eye to them, save that the Count Spinola, an Italian officer of some reputation, who had been brought thither mortally wounded, had been carried off as a sort of trophy to be publicly displayed to all who cared to see him; and Alphonso in an instant picked out his brother from the few motionless forms lying together, and was bending over him the next moment and speaking his name. But Rodrigo was quite unconscious, and did not hear or answer; and in a short time he was transported under the direction of the master of the house to the comfortable mansion in Hooch Straet, where Maud gave up her time willingly to try to bind up his wounds

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and restore him to consciousness, although no one could look at him and doubt that his life was fast ebbing away.

Alphonso, pale but perfectly calm, assisted the ministrations of the girl, the joy-bells and frantic cheering in the streets below coming as a strange accompaniment to his task. At last the workers were rewarded by seeing the fast-shut eyes slowly unclose, and Alphonso bent forward and spoke his brother's name.

A look of recognition dawned in the eyes of the dying man.

"Alphonso!" he whispered, and then strove to lift his head and look about him. But his brother laid him back and told him all he wished to know.

"Seek not to speak, my brother; thou hast not strength. It is not I who have come to thee, but thou who hast been brought hither to me, here in this beleaguered city. Our general has had a reverse upon the dike. Antwerp is to be saved at last. But we must not count them as foes who have shown such kindness to thee and me. I have long since ceased to do so. I owe my life to their care many times over."

The hand of death was upon Rodrigo. The strife of earth already seemed far distant from him. It was not of his lost cause (as he would have believed it to be) nor of the mortification of defeat that he was thinking, but of his brother—the one being in the world whom he had to love, and whom he was about to leave behind, a prisoner in the hands of the foe.

"Tell me of thyself, Alphonso, of thyself," he whispered

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faintly. "I have not long to live. I shall die a soldier's death, which is all I ever asked or wished. But what of thee—of thee?"

"My brother, I have ceased to desire a soldier's life; and I fear me did I desire it never so well I should prove but a sorry soldier in the future. Since thou must go I have no desire for the camp, nor yet for the home we once loved as boys together. Rodrigo, when we may leave this city at last, and I have my liberty restored to me, which these good friends assure me of, methinks I shall sojourn to England and reside there. Thou art surprised, but it is no new thought to me. Spain would no longer be safe for me. I have no time to explain to thee why. I love not the thought of returning thither, and since thou art not there my last tie is broken. To England—free England—I trust I may soon travel, and there I hope to wed her to whom my heart has long been given. When once as a free man I may think such thoughts again, I know well now who is the maiden whom I shall ask to share my life with me, for I love her with my whole heart and soul."

Maud had left the brothers together when once the wounded man recovered consciousness, but not before Rodrigo's eyes had dwelt more than once with a wistful admiration and gratitude upon her fair face.

"Was it yon maid who went from us but now?" he asked; and although Alphonso coloured quickly as he for the first time put the thought into definite shape, he answered without hesitation,—

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"Yes, brother mine, that was the maiden—Mistress Maud Wilford. A very treasure, methinks, of gentle womanhood; an English maiden by descent, albeit born in these lands; not noble as the world has it, but with the true nobility of soul which we learn how to prize in our hours of sorrow and pain and captivity. Brother, wilt thou give me thy blessing and good-will in this thing?"

Rodrigo a few hours before might have shrunk in pain from the thought of seeing his brother mated with any one not his equal by birth; for the inherent Spanish pride was strong in its young nobility, and both brothers had naturally inherited it. But when a man is quickly leaving a world where such distinctions exist for another where rank is differently meted, these differences fade at once into strange insignificance; and his reply was spoken with a smile strangely luminous and bright.

"My blessing? Ay, that will I give thee with all my heart, and trust that the happiness thou meritest may be thine, my brother. Methinks I am well pleased that the strife of battle and the stir of the camp will no longer be thine, nor such a death as this, albeit to die with thy hand in mine and thy voice in mine ear is happiness I looked not to know. Thou wilt be far happier with wife and babes around thee; and in another land where peace reigns thou wilt find happiness greater than thou ever didst in the martial scenes in which we have lived so long. Thou wert never made for a soldier, brother; a student, a man of books and of peace—that is what thou art by nature. I am happy in leaving thee thus; and when I am gone

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thou wilt have all, and wilt be a prosperous man wherever thou mayest choose to dwell. I would fain see again the sweet maiden whom thou hast chosen. Is your troth plighted yet?"

"Nay; I have spoken no word to her as yet. A prisoner as I am, how might I dare to think of it? And yet methinks she knows, and I trust she will learn in some sort to return the love I bear her. I will ask her to come hither once again; I know she will gladly do so."

All this talk had not taken place quickly and uninterruptedly as given here, but by degrees and in short phrases, as Rodrigo could find breath to speak. Maud had been nigh upon an hour from the room, when she hastened back at Alphonso's request, and then she saw that the end could not be far off. She would have called for help, but Alphonso restrained her, and said softly,—

"My brother would fain speak a word to you, sweet Mistress Maud;" and in a vague wonderment she went forward and bent over him.

"Señor, can I do aught for you?" she asked gently; and his eyes opened and met hers with a glance that thrilled her strangely. He made a slight effort to take her hand, and she quickly put her soft fingers into it.

"I want to thank you—for all—for him," and his eyes sought his brother's face for a moment. "I have heard all. I am grateful. I would that it might be so always—that I might leave him—to thee."

That was all; there was no strength or breath for more. The dark eyes closed, and a little shiver ran

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through the prostrate frame. Alphonso led Maud away, his face pale and grave. He knew that he had no longer a kinsman left in the world.

But Antwerp was all *en fête*. Garlands decked the streets, flags waved, joy-bells clanged and crashed; and in the town-hall a wonderful banquet was being spread to do honour to Hohenlo and this glorious victory. All the city thronged to see the hero walk into the hall, clad in white velvet, his floating locks perfumed, his jewelled sword by his side, his plumed hat carried in his hand because the ceaseless roar of applause gave him no chance of placing it upon his head. Bowing his graceful acknowledgments of this public triumph, Hohenlo walked up and took his place at the head of the longest table. All the beauty and rank of Antwerp had assembled there to-night; whilst outside in the streets blazing bonfires and a ceaseless clamour of delight testified that the populace was abroad and enjoying a revel of a different kind.

The banquet sped merrily on its way; delicate viands (one wonders how in such times as these they had been procured) and choice wines were circulating in that goodly company; Hohenlo, with sparkling eyes and brimming goblet, was returning the compliments showered upon him, and toasting in turn the gallant soldiers they had left upon the dike (ah, why had they so left them — they the generals in charge?), when the hubbub and tumult without began in some subtle way to change its character. First there was a sudden hush, so strange that, although the outside noise had scarcely been noticed, its

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cessation caused a corresponding silence within the great hall.

A noble dame, who had just before been speaking of a weight upon her heart, and wishing they had had further news of the men upon the dike, now turned pale, and whispered to her companion that she had feared this triumph of to-day would be followed by gloom to-morrow, when a roar that was no longer of triumph, but of rage, of horror, of dismay, broke upon the listening ears within that decked and lighted hall; and the roar increased in volume, as a wave increases when it rushes foaming upon the shore, till the very foundations of the place seemed to shake, and the affrighted guests rose to their feet, their eyes fixed wide in terror upon the great doors at the end of the long room.

They had not to wait long. With a crash and a bang these doors burst open, and into the hall there streamed a strange multitude, their faces pale, their eyes gleaming with ferocity, their breath coming in short, sharp gasps that debarred them for the moment from articulate speech. The cause of this breathlessness was soon understood. They were carrying with them helpless burdens—ghastly human burdens—men who had been that day instinct with life and vigour, and were now carried back to their homes to die, hacked some of them almost out of the semblance of humanity, fearfully maimed and injured all, some passive and unconscious, others able to moan out the terrible words taken up and screamed and hissed and hooted by the furious throng without,—

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"Lost, lost! all lost! We held the dike for three hours. We made three great breaches there. But our leaders deserted us. The Spaniards came in redoubled force with Parma at their head. They attacked us with fearful force. We had none to look to, none to lead us. We fought to the last; hundreds and thousands of corpses were left there to show that we did our best. But it was too much. We were deserted by those who should have been with us. The sea at last deserted us, and took our vessels from us. We could do no more. Already the Prince is repairing our breaches with the dead bodies of our comrades, and with the materials brought to build our own intrenchment upon the dike. All is lost! all is lost! Antwerp must now be left to her fate!"

That was the story whispered by those white, stiffening lips—a bit from one and a bit from another; that was the story taken up and yelled in its thousand different versions by a thousand furious citizens.

Betrayed again—lost by another blunder so gigantic, as it appeared now, that those who heard the tale could scarce credit their senses! And in that banqueting-hall —that banquet so strangely interrupted by the influx of these ghastly guests, laid down upon the floor to die—what effect did it have there? What said the dashing Count, who had been bowing his acknowledgments and receiving the plaudits of all Antwerp for all these triumphant hours?

With a face suddenly grown white with horror, Hohenlo sprang from his seat and made a dash towards the door, but recoiled as he saw what was being brought in. Stand-

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ing with wide-open lips and blank, terror-filled eyes, he remained for one long minute rooted to the spot.

But the deep curses of those who were bearing in their ghastly burden, and the frantic yelling of the crowd without, speedily awoke him from his trance; and with a wild cry that rose even above the din and tumult around, he put his hands before his face and fled from the hall by a side door in very terror of his life.

He might well fear. All Antwerp was beside itself; and he, the darling and the idol of the morning, had to-night to fly for his life from the fury of the people, and hide himself where he could till the storm had overpassed and had spent itself.

"Saved! saved! saved!" had been the joyous triumphal shout of the morning; by night a deeper gloom than ever had settled upon the devoted city, and its white-faced burghers went about looking in each other's eyes as though afraid what they might read there.

"Lost! all lost! Antwerp is lost!" was the cry of the furious mob, as it surged through the streets and squares, and set the bells tolling which had been clamouring out their joy before.

All lost! and all through another of those fatal blunders which had been from the beginning the bane of that hapless city.

O Antwerp, Antwerp, Antwerp! always doomed to failure; victory ever snatched away in the moment of triumph! What a history hast thou had, and what lessons may be learned from thee when thy story comes to be read!

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEATH OF HOPE.

LAMENTATION and mourning and woe!

Well indeed did these words apply to the city of Antwerp after that last and most crushing defeat upon the great dike. All heart and hope now seemed to have deserted the soldiers and the citizens. Diminished numbers rendered any further aggressive policy out of their power; hopelessness had taken the place of confidence; distrust of their leaders and a sullen, brooding wrath settled down in the hearts of all. Famine was slowly but surely approaching, and would soon be stalking in their streets; whilst the belief in possible rescue of their city out of the iron hand of Parma had died away, not to awaken again.

"We are betrayed! we are undone! we are lost!" such were the words to be heard upon the lips of all. The extravagant height to which the people's hopes had arisen, and their absolute certainty for a few mad hours that Antwerp was saved, only threw the city later into the deeper gloom. Already there were ugly mutterings in the air. Bands of wild-eyed men, who had begun to feel something of the pinch of want, would prowl about the

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city by day and night, muttering savage threats. If the Burgomaster showed himself abroad, as he fearlessly did whenever duty called him, he was received with hisses and hootings, and was sometimes almost mobbed by the angry citizens. They began to raise shouts for "Bread, bread, bread!" and although capitulation had not openly been spoken of, there were hundreds in the city already longing for it, and it was known that some sort of negotiation was being opened already with the triumphant Prince of Parma.

Had it been a time when minor vexations could have greatly touched the people, the fate of their monster vessel, so grandiloquently called the *War's End*, might have aroused their indignation and shame.

The laughing-stock of Gianibelli and a few wiser spirits, this gigantic ship had been the darling and the hope of hundreds and thousands in the city, and the vast amount of money expended upon her would have victualled Antwerp for months.

This monster vessel was a marvel of strength and size, having bulwarks ten feet thick, musket-proof roofs to her decks, four masts, three helms, and tiers upon tiers of artillery. She could accommodate a thousand men within her floating walls; and as she was supported in an ingenious fashion upon barrels and corks, she could not sink, even though her sides should be pierced. Those who had watched her slow construction went away boasting of the great things she would accomplish when all was ready; but, alas! the *Bugaboo*, as the Spaniards irreverently

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christened her, proved only another of the gigantic blunders for which the siege of Antwerp is famous.

She had been started forth from the city shortly before the projected attack on the Kowenstyn, with the hope that she would render signal and effective service in that important struggle; but when once in the water, it quickly appeared that this great floating fortress would neither sail nor steer. She was perfectly unmanageable, and drifted helplessly about till she ran on some shoals, and had to be deserted lest she should contrive to heel over with her thousand men.

A day or two after the struggle on the dike, the Spaniards came out and took possession of her, none having heart to try to prevent them, and after some trouble succeeded in bringing her in safety to the Prince of Parma. After being well examined and ridiculed, she was finally broken up by her captors, whilst her guns and ammunition proved a welcome addition to their scanty stores.

But even this news could hardly stir up the hearts of the burghers to more than a passing sense of shame and anger. They were so utterly cast down and despairing that one more drop in the cup mattered but little.

"If they had but listened to me! if they had but listened to me!" cried Gianibelli, as he brought this last item of news to his friends in Hooch Straet at the close of the long summer's day. It was barely June yet, but an unwonted heat had set in over the land. It was a merciful thing for those houses where food was scarce, for the heat and the general depression did not tend to hunger.

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In Hooch Straet, however, there was no pinch of want. Roosje's careful preparations, and the diminishing of the large party, had alike helped to eke out supplies in a way that was the envy of many less provident households. They had enough and to spare, and could afford to be generous to poorer neighbours; but just now a heavier weight than that of mere scarcity was weighing them down. Van der Hammer and his wife sat hand in hand in the long room, bowed down by grief for the loss of their two brave boys; whilst young Maurice, looking very white and wan, lay stretched upon a couch hard by, with his wounded arm in a sling, Coosje sitting beside him to fan him and keep off the flies; and whilst she was thus occupied the tears would steal down her cheeks, and she would be forced to pause to wipe them away before she could continue her little offices.

Above in an upper chamber lay Lionel, sedulously tended by his wife. He had been sorely wounded; but no vital part was touched, as all the doctors agreed, although the long, exhausting strain he had put upon himself after receiving these hurts rendered them more severe than they would otherwise have been. He had scarcely opened his eyes or his lips since having been brought home on that fatal evening. Weariness of body and mind and despair of spirit alike pressed him down, and the only sign of consciousness he showed was that he was restless when his wife was not beside him.

Malcolm was the only one who had returned sound in body from the fight, and how he had escaped wounds was

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a marvel, since he had been again and again in the thickest of the conflict. He was almost ashamed of this immunity; but those about him were thankful to have one of their party sound and whole. Again and again was he called upon to tell the story of that gallant fight and stubborn struggle, and never did he tell it without a throb of pain and anger as he remembered how the soldiers had been left with the victory still insecure and the hottest of the struggle yet to come.

Alphonso was keenly interested in the tale from first to last, and especially in the part that related to his own brother and to the other Spanish officer who had come to the aid of the fugitives when the fight was really at an end.

"It was Carlos de Cueva, thou sayest? I am well pleased to hear that. I knew he was on the side of mercy and pity when he would let his true nature be seen. Thou hadst seen him before, hadst thou not, Malcolm, when thou wert carried into the Spanish camp as prisoner? Didst thou not know him again?"

"Not till he told me his name. We were both too bloody and battered and bewildered by the tumult to have thought for aught else. I had my head-piece yet on, and he could not see my face; and though I did see his, and it seemed in some sort familiar, I had no time or thought to spare for cudgelling my memory. It was not till I asked his name, and he answered me so courteously, that I recollected who he was or that I had seen him before."

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Alphonso shared in the general mourning and depression that had fallen on the city. Although it was now probable that the capitulation of Antwerp would restore him to liberty, the death of his brother had been a heavy blow; and the thought of his own uncertain future sometimes lay like a heavy cloud upon him. It was not altogether easy to make up his mind to perpetual exile in a foreign land. There were moments when he asked himself whether all these new dreams and feelings were not part of some long vision or delusion, and whether he should not wake up at the last to find himself the old Alphonso, a soldier of the Spanish king, and a true son of the Romish Church, as he had always been without doubt or qualm until he had been seized with a vehement curiosity to understand the feelings of these citizens of Antwerp.

But these doubts never arose save when he was separated from Maud, and in her presence they vanished like vapour-wreaths before a summer sun. When she was speaking to him of their future plans, and of that flight to England for which already full preparations were being made, he knew that where she went he must go also; that no country could be home for him where she was not; and that there could be no retracing of the steps he had taken, no returning to those old blind beliefs he had once held, and which would be absolutely required of him should he put himself again into the hands of his former spiritual advisers.

No words of love had passed his lips as yet, but all his own small scruples of pride had broken down at once and for ever. He only waited now till as a free man he could

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ask her at her brother's or her father's hand. He had none to take umbrage at his alliance with the more humbly-born maiden; he was about to cut adrift from his old moorings and launch himself upon a new existence. There were times when the very thought of this change sent quick thrills of joy through all his pulses. There had been much to revolt him with the life of the last few years, and with the constant warfare against religious liberty to which the Spanish king had pledged himself. When he seriously considered whether he could himself engage again in such a warfare, he knew that he could not; and everything he heard of life in peaceful England attracted him more and more.

Preparations for departure from the Provinces so soon as the siege should be at an end were being carried actively forward by the Van der Hammers, in spite of public disaster and private loss. One of the many trading-sloops which belonged to the merchants Wilford and Van der Hammer had been some time within the city, having put in for repairs just before the commencement of the siege, and used from time to time by the city authorities when pressed for transport-boats or other vessels in time of activity. But all such pressure was now at an end, and for some time the sloop had been lying idle in its little basin near to the warehouses where the merchants had been wont to store their goods; and steady preparations were now going forward to fit it up and store away in it such heir-looms and valuables as the family were anxious to take away with them to their new home across the water.

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This packing up and making ready had been a great resource to all concerned. The heavy pieces of furniture in the old house had perforce to be left behind; but it was wonderful what a little dexterity and management would do in getting many impracticable but much-prized treasures taken to pieces and stowed away in the little vessel. And for once in his life the ingenious mechanician Gianibelli had shown himself in a new light, and had bent his versatile mind to the task of assisting in the removal of these household gods, and seeing them safely placed on board the *Seagull*, as the light little sloop was called. Great chests of linen, all the precious glass and china and silver, dear to the heart of the Dutch housevrow, were gradually packed and stowed in the hold of the little vessel. The house in Hooch Straet began to look bare and desolate; but it was not a desolation which struck chill upon the hearts of the inmates, for it spoke rather of coming freedom, and of the new home whither their hearts and hopes were tending. Their talk now was all of England, and they would press round Lionel to ask him all he could remember of the country he had left whilst still a boy. Gianibelli, too, had visited that land, and spoke of it with a shade less of contempt than he did of some others. He would not consent to make one of the party thither. His mind was still bent upon travelling in the East, and increasing there his stock of strange lore which brought him little but ridicule and contempt. Still he was glad enough to let his daughter go. He no longer wanted her with him; and he had never swerved from the promise made to

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Malcolm, that if he but brought him news of the breach made by his fire-ships in Parma's bridge, he would give him Veronica's hand in marriage.

That promise was about to be fulfilled now. They had waited in the hope that Antwerp would be free at last, and that under happier auspices the nuptials might be celebrated; but that hope was now at an end, and on the very evening that Gianibelli brought in the news of the fate of the great *War's End,* Malcolm boldly asked why he and Veronica might not be made man and wife forthwith.

"For why should we wait?" he questioned. "We know not what a day may bring forth. Already messengers are passing to and fro betwixt the city and the Spanish camp, and at any time we might hear that terms of capitulation were agreed upon. Then we should be all for instant departure so soon as the bridge were destroyed, and there would scarce be time to hurry through the marriage. Why not make all sure now? Veronica is ready, and in sooth so am I. This house is large, and needs more faces to fill it; and provision is running short with you, whilst here we have plenty. Let us be wed with all speed, and then thou and she can alike come hither to be with us to the end. When our little sloop goes forth from this doomed city, it can carry thee to the coast, where thou canst make thine own agreement for transport to the distant East. Thy preparations, like ours, are all made. What hinders us from espousing each other and living in one household until we may make our escape from Antwerp?"

Gianibelli had nothing to urge against this view of the

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matter. He was willing, and Veronica more than willing, to leave her dismal and dismantled home to come to this one with Malcolm. All looked upon her now as a sister, and since there had come so many gaps in the circle of faces around that board, it was felt that this addition to their party would be doubly welcome.

It was no time for rejoicings or festivity. Lionel had recovered consciousness by this time, and when Malcolm came to his bedside and in a low voice detailed this project to him, he gave it his full sanction and approval. But in face of all the calamities at home and abroad there could be no open rejoicings, and the thing was very quietly done; Veronica at last openly declaring that she would be married according to the simple rites of the reformed faith, to which at heart she had long been a convert, and to which she now declared herself prepared to adhere openly, whatever might be the peril of so doing.

Gianibelli shrugged his shoulders, but made no remonstrance. Possibly he had learned by this time that resistance in matters of this sort was of very little avail, and that it was small use erecting barriers of sand against an incoming tide. The wave of public opinion sweeping over the land was one far too strong to be stemmed by all the legions of Spain; was it likely his words would prevail against it, if it had caught his daughter upon its mighty crest?

Nor was Gianibelli a man to trouble himself much about matters of creed. One religion was to him very much like another. He was far less devout than was usual with men

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of almost all classes at that day; and if his daughter chose to adopt her husband's faith, he was not going to oppose her. Perhaps in his heart of hearts he thought she did well. To be at variance on such points is seldom a happy thing in married life. In England she was safer as a Protestant than as a Romanist, as things were now; and to England she would certainly go so soon as the iron hand of the Spanish general was taken from the city.

But there was one surprise in store for Malcolm with regard to his bride. He had certainly never thought of asking for any dowry with Veronica, and she had been distressed at coming to him without that portion and even without that outfit which a Dutch or Flemish maiden would almost for certain have possessed in like case. Malcolm would not listen to her words of regret, telling her that he wanted nothing but her heart and her hand; and that when once free of the luckless city and land, he and his family would again be wealthy and prosperous; also that he was to have a share in the mercantile business, and should be quickly a thriving man. So she did not let this lack of gold weigh upon her spirits, and the happiness of feeling herself at last made Malcolm's wife was too great to permit the interposition of any unwelcome thoughts; still she did regret that she came to him so portionless and dowerless, and it was as great an astonishment to her as to her young husband when her father sprang upon them his surprise.

They were sitting at supper, and Roosje had contrived to give something of a festal air to the board; for although

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the wedding had been perfectly quiet, she desired that Veronica should feel she had as hearty a welcome into her husband's family as it was possible to give. There were flowers upon the table—some that Coosje had contrived to get hold of; and a cake had been made by Roosje's clever hands, and some trifling dainties by Maud's. Alphonso, too, had sold a jewel—almost the only personal possession he owned—in order to make a present to the bride; and altogether the household had managed to cheer up and to put on an air of festivity that was a relief from the gloom without. Gianibelli had moved his few effects from his dark little house hard by to the more cheerful abode in Hooch Straet; and amongst these effects was a strongly-bound box of some heavy wood, with great brass locks and clasps. This box was one which Veronica had never seen before, but which she imagined to contain some of his precious books, or some machine or invention which he desired to hide from all possibility of prying eyes.

This very heavy box had been transported with some difficulty from one house to the other, and now when they were all assembled at supper together, they saw that it was standing at one end of the long table which the present party was unable to fill. Several of the circle eyed it from time to time with curious glances, and at last Coosje put into words the question which had suggested itself to them all.

"Master Gianibelli, what may be in yonder coffer, and wherefore stands it there?"

"It is the dowry of my daughter Veronica," answered the

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old Italian, with a sudden flashing look across the table at Malcolm, "and I have brought it hither to put it under the charge of her husband." He paused a moment, searching in his pockets, and at last he drew out a key which he handed ceremoniously to Malcolm.

"That will open the coffer when you are disposed to examine its contents," he remarked brusquely. "You have got all my treasure now. It is the way of the world. The young have all the good, and the old are robbed even of what they had. I complain not. It is the way of the world, the way of this life. Take what you can get, boy, and make the most of it whilst youth lasts. When you grow to be an old man you will find yourself stripped of everything, and left to die alone."

Veronica had gone round and put her arms about her father's neck. Although she knew that his bitter speeches were made more from force of habit than because he meant much by them, it pained her to hear him speak so.

"Father, dear father, if you would only come with us; if you would only not go where you must be alone!"

"Pooh, child; I am best alone. I must see these strange lands, and learn the secrets they hold. I want nothing else. I have no need of company; I am best alone. I could not take thee, and I would not have any other. Go to; thou hast thy husband. Be a good wife and be happy. Perchance in days to come I will find my way to thy hearth yet, and hear thy children call me grandsire; but not yet, not yet! I have more, much more to learn ere that day of rest may come. Go thy way, child, and heed

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not me. I have a life to live that thou couldst never share."

Across the table the elder Van der Hammer was speaking in his slow and ponderous fashion.

"My good friend, believe me that age does not rob us of all, if we have lived our life to good purpose. We need not be alone, we need not be deserted. It is with us then as with all other matters in this world—we do but reap what we have sown. If we have a poor and sorrowful harvest to look upon, it is because our sowing-time was wasted. If we are deserted by friends, it is because we have not deserved their love. If our children leave us—"

But the speaker paused in the midst of his rounded periods, because he saw that nobody was heeding him, nobody was listening to the moral he was striving to point. Malcolm had gone round to the coffer, and was undoing its ingenious fastenings by means of the key, and all the rest were pressing round him to see what this strange box should contain when its lid was raised.

As for Malcolm himself, although his curiosity was excited, he did not expect anything of much practical value. He imagined this heavy case to contain some model dear to the heart of the inventor, and a contrivance that might possibly be worth a fortune to the man who could let its value be seen and known. But more than this he had not looked for, and he did not suppose he should find much use for the golden secret. What, therefore, was his surprise on raising the lid to see that the box was filled with gold and silver ornaments, with rolls of golden coins, and with

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sparkling gems, some of which he could see must be of considerable value.

A cry of astonishment burst from all present. Van der Hammer himself rose from the table and came round to look. He lifted out a necklace of costly workmanship and examined it carefully; then turning an inquiring glance upon the Italian, who sat very still and quiet, a slight smile hovering round the corners of his thin lips, he asked how he had come by such treasures, and how he had contrived thus to preserve them.

With a slight shrug of the shoulders Gianibelli answered,—

"They have come to me from here, from there, from all over. I have all my life been a wanderer. I have been feasted by princes sometimes, and sometimes flouted and scorned. I have had my ups and my downs; I have had my enemies and my friends. But I have taken toll sometimes from the great ones of the earth, and I have sold them secrets now and again, for which they have had a heavy price to pay. Ah, and the women too! they have bought secrets from Gianibelli, and have paid for them with trinkets such as these you are handling at this moment, good sir. And of what use were such baubles to me? What was I to do with them? Perchance if I tried to sell them I should be haled off to prison as a thief—there were always plenty to bear witness against the wizard, and to vow that he filched away by magic what he could get by none other means. No; I knew better than that. I had my treasure-chest, and there I deposited

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my wages. 'Some day they will be useful,' I would say to myself; and when I had a daughter to think for, I would lay them aside with the greater zest, and say to myself as I did so, 'This shall be thy dowry, my child.' Of late I have had but little of this world's goods to set aside, but I never drew upon the hoard that lay there, together with some gold and valuables that came to me with thy mother, Veronica. Now it is all thine. Thy husband thought to wed thee without dowry, and I was glad he should seem so to do, for thus I knew his heart was stanch.—But now, honest lad, thou canst take this and do with it as thou wilt. When the day comes for finding a home across the water for thyself and for her, I trow some of yon rolls will not come amiss."

Without another word, bad or good, Gianibelli pushed back his chair and walked from the room. He was less at home in scenes of pleasure and domestic peace than in his own den with his books and instruments about him; and he seemed happier when indulging in mocking vituperation than when the softer mood was upon him. Still, it was these glimpses he gave from time to time of another nature beneath the fiery crust ever ready to burst into flame that explained to others the devotion with which his daughter had always regarded him. She knew that in spite of his harsh tongue and gloomy ways he did love her truly; and this proof of his love in such solid form not only astonished her, but took the breath from all beholders.

"And so often he has wanted money sorely!" whispered Veronica, with tears in her eyes. "I know it has

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happened times and again that he has been in a sore strait for a few gold pieces, that he might improve or complete some discovery. He has denied himself almost the necessaries of life to get what he thought needful for it, and all the while he had all this!"

"Truly it must have been a strong love that kept his hands from such a treasure in the time of need," remarked Van der Hammer, with a thoughtful air. "Methinks we must something have misjudged yon good friend of ours in calling him hard and unfeeling. His heart is none so different from the rest of us, albeit he would scarce thank us for saying as much of him."

Veronica looked up at Malcolm with a clear brightness in her eyes.

"I am glad for thy sake, dear love, that I come not to thee empty-handed; but for myself I care little. I have thy love, and that is all I ever asked."

"And thine all that I desire," answered Malcolm fervently. "As for these gay baubles, they have their use; but methinks we will get thy good father to take the half of them for his own use when he journeys abroad into foreign lands. The other half will be more than enough for us; and we shall be happier knowing that he starts forth with gold in his purse."

"Oh yes," cried Veronica quickly; "we will divide it with him. We shall have so few wants when we reach England and settle down in a land of peace and plenty. Ah, would the days had come when this dreadful siege should be at an end!"

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CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

A BLAZING day in August—the sun shining in a cloudless sky, the waters of the wide Scheldt reflecting back the hot sunlight, whilst all its myriad waves seemed laughing and rejoicing.

An air of rejoicing seemed also to hang about the city. It wore an aspect that suggested recent festivity and merry-making, and indeed upon the faces of nine-tenths of the inhabitants remaining there satisfaction and contentment was the prevailing expression. And yet Antwerp was a conquered city; she had capitulated at last to the great commander who had so long been holding her shut in in an iron grasp, and the joyful aspect the place wore might have perplexed any onlooker unacquainted with the curious history of that most curious siege.

How the burghers, who had been resolved never, never to give way; never to yield up their liberties or their lives to the Spanish tyrant; never to submit to the conditions he invariably laid upon all those places which returned, either by force or guile, beneath his sway—how it came that these men now welcomed the conquering Prince

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of Parma within their walls with every demonstration of joy, and made the day of capitulation a day of public rejoicing and thanksgiving, is one of those mysteries which perplex the reader of history even yet. That Parma had done much by his courtesy and patience, and by his real desire to be as gentle towards the people as lay in his power, to win their confidence and even their affection, cannot be denied; and his personal fascination had also made an immense impression upon the Burgomaster, who had had private as well as public conferences with him during the weeks that elapsed between the final downfall of hope and the day when the city formally capitulated. Nevertheless, since neither religious toleration nor an immunity from a Spanish garrison (the two points upon which the city magistrates had declared they would stand out for ever) had been conceded, and as already all the "heretics"—which meant the wealthiest and most important citizens—were leaving it as fast as they could, and to sagacious eyes the doom of the city was already spoken, it was hard to see where the rejoicing came in. But the inconsistencies of mankind are past reasoning about; and at least it was something to escape the horrors of famine, and those far worse horrors of rapine and savage ferocity which had so often disgraced the annals of the Spanish victories, and had rendered the very thought of capitulation a terror to so many.

Not a trace of any such savage scenes had here been witnessed. On the contrary, all had been harmony and good-will—the soldiers who once had met in mortal combat

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now drinking and feasting amicably together, all the long-standing bitterness laid aside for a time, and nothing thought of but merry-making and rejoicing.

Three or four days had thus been passed; and now upon one of the quays, just as the sun began to sink in the sky, a little crowd had assembled about a white-sailed sloop which from her aspect was evidently about to put to sea with all her freight and passengers.

Some of these passengers were already upon deck: a thin-faced man of noble aspect, leaning on the arm of his wife, whilst some children clustered about them; and an older couple, who sat hand in hand a little apart, as though they had had enough of farewells for one day.

Upon the quay there was a group of some dozen younger persons of both sexes, and much eager talk was passing between them, though they knew the time for farewells had actually come.

"Thy mind is made up, Alphonso?" questioned a very knightly-looking man, in the garb of a Spanish gentleman. "Thou wilt not think again of Spain, and of the old free life of the camp?"

Alphonso shook his head.

"Nay, Carlos: I have gone too far to draw back, even did I wish; and, to speak the truth, I have no such desire. I am out of harness—I misdoubt me that I shall ever be a soldier again; and as for the life which might await me in the old home, alone and without my brother, I would not have it at any price. No, no; I have my own thoughts, my own plans, for the future, brighter than any

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thou canst tempt me with. I am glad I have seen thee again, good comrade—glad that thine will be one of the last faces I shall see in quitting this land for ever. But England will be a happier and a safer place for me now, and I have few regrets for the life I leave behind."

"Well, well, thou knowest best, and perchance thou art right. I would not have thee do other than as thy heart prompts. I will see as soon as may be to the sale of thy estate, and will forward the money to thee by a safe hand. I must shortly to Spain to look to mine own affairs, which are something in confusion after the large advances I have made to his Majesty. I will see quickly to thine also, and thou shalt find thyself a wealthy man. And now, since thou must go, farewell, and the Holy Saints bless and keep thee! We have lost a good comrade in thee, Alphonso, and yet I have ever felt that thou wast scarcely in thy place in the camp."

"God bless and keep thee, Carlos!" answered Alphonso, grasping his old comrade by the hand; and then he turned and met the eyes of Maud fastened upon him with something of wistfulness in their gaze, and a quick throb went through his heart.

"Are you sorry to be leaving your own countrymen, Señor?" she asked gently, as he stepped to her side to assist her to cross the plank which led to the deck of the vessel; and he looked down into her eyes, and said in a tone which only she could hear,—

"Nay, sweet Maud; I am not sorry, because I go with thee. Where thou dost dwell will in the days to come be

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home to me. I could not call any land home unless thy face were there to bless it."

A crimson blush rose in her face, but she made no attempt to speak. It was the first word of open love he had ever addressed to her, and it filled her with a strange tumult of joy, and yet she had known for many a long day now that she and Alphonso were all in all to one another.

Diego was saying farewell to Coosje.

"Think of me sometimes," he said, in his quick, abrupt fashion, "for I shall think of you, as I have often done. I never thought to learn a lesson of honour from a heretic and from a maid; but when I look at the agate heart I have always worn since you gave it me, I cannot but remember the lessons I was taught. Lady, I am glad I have seen you once again. I wished to tell you that I thank you for the words you spoke to me then. I shall remember them always; I shall remember you always. And now farewell; and a happy and prosperous life be yours."

With the sound of hearty good wishes from quite a little crowd, the party stepped on board the white-winged *Seagull*, some smilingly and with buoyant step, others with a few tears for the home they were leaving behind; but all happy and confident and very hopeful for the future, very thankful, too, to be leaving behind a country where the chances of freedom seemed still so dim and distant, and to be voyaging forth to a land where a home and a welcome awaited them, and where they could read the

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Word of God and worship Him after their own fashion without fear of molestation.

Perhaps the brightest faces of the group belonged to Malcolm and Veronica, who in their newly-wedded happiness seemed to have nothing to regret, and no thoughts but those of joy and peace. Old Van der Hammer and his wife perhaps felt the parting the most; for they were too old to bear transplanting easily, and yet to remain in the now reconciled and submitted city was a thing not to be thought of. Lionel stood leaning on his wife's arm as the anchor was raised and the little sloop began to slip noiselessly through the gleaming water, and a strangely earnest look was on his face as he saw the spires and bastions of the city receding from his sight.

"O Antwerp!" he said, speaking more to himself than to his wife; "O blind, misguided, deluded city! what strange vicissitudes have been thine, and how far different thy fate might have been hadst thou but been willing to be led, willing to obey! Ah, that sin of disobedience, and impatience of rule, how it saps the strength and virtue from every heart, from every cause! O Antwerp, I fear me thy doom is sealed! Thy power and thy grandeur are gone for ever! Thou wilt sit a queen no more. But the sceptre will pass away to other lands and to other cities, where men have learned to prize the Word of God before all else, and where no fear of consequences will hinder them from resisting to the death the tyranny which binds the soul as well as the bodies of men. Those are the cities which henceforth will live and flourish, and I

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take it that the land to which we are sailing has a great future in store for her. Farewell, Antwerp! farewell, poor, deluded city of confusion! Thou wilt soon learn in thy reaping what thou hast this day sown. Hadst thou had the patriot heart of Leyden—the power to suffer and to endure—thou mightest yet have averted this doom; and hadst thou listened to the voice of wisdom, thou hadst long since scattered thy foes to the winds and waves, and freed thyself from the galling chain. But thou wouldest not, thou wouldest not, and now thy doom is sealed!"

The musings of this citizen, whose mind and abilities were considerably in advance of his power and authority, were suddenly brought to an end by the eager exclamations of those about him, who broke into excited interjection.

"The bridge, the bridge, the great bridge! Look, look! See, there it is before us! Parma's bridge! Oh, what a wonderful thing it must have been! Malcolm, was it really stretched right across the river from bank to bank when thou didst see it?"

They all crowded to the side of the sloop to look, as the little vessel approached the wonderful structure. A great breach had already been made in it, so that it no longer impeded the traffic of the river. In a few days it would be altogether destroyed; but for the moment it still stood, save for the centre rift; whilst the protecting rafts had been dragged ashore, and were being broken up leisurely there.

A strange thrill ran through the whole of the little party as they cleft their way through that strange struc-

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ture, exchanging courteous greetings with the Spanish sentries who still watched the river traffic, and who, recognizing Alphonso, saluted respectfully.

As they passed that bristling barrier, with its guns and forts and armed men, and shot out into the widening river below, where the forts of Lillo and Liefkenshoek could be seen dimly rising in the distance, Roosje drew a little sobbing breath, and said,—

"Ah, now I feel that I can breathe; now I can feel that we are free! Thank God that we are all here together; that none are left behind, save those who died doing their duty for their country and their God! Oh, what a blessed thing is liberty to those who know what it was for long weeks and months to be within city walls, helpless, sundered from all the world beside—Shut In!"

THE END.

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